Technological Ambiguity and the Uneasy Conscience: Bringing Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology into Dialogue with the Philosophy of Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse Towards a Christian Conception of Responsibility in the Technical Age

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by

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Abstract

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Contemporary discussions regarding ethics in the technological society are obscured by faulty presuppositions regarding the answer to one question: is technology neutral or non-neutral? The question itself presents a binary that betrays a dimension of human nature that allows for the possibility of responsibility within the technological society to exist. We may presume human transcendence over, or contingence to, technology. In so doing, we either assuage one's conscience of any moral deliberation whatsoever, or inhibit one's freedom to the point of a mindless determinism. In either occasion, one is left with an *easy conscience*—an inability to attribute evil in the technological society to human conduct.

There are at least two thinkers, Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse, who frame their understanding of the question of technological neutrality in a way that diminishes the pitfalls of either position. While Mumford holds that technology is neutral, he is still attentively critical of the philosophical presumptions that led to the rise of the technological society. While Marcuse holds that technology is non-neutral, his critique of the technological society does not default to a despairing determinism.

However, despite their contributions, both still presume anthropologies that lead them toward the same binary that both originally resisted, articulating the human as so transcendent over (Mumford) or contingent to (Marcuse) technology that one lacks the tensions necessary to establish an *uneasy conscience*—the recognition that humans are responsible for evil in the world.

In response, this thesis will utilize Reinhold Niebuhr's method of Christian Realism as a way of establishing an anthropology upon which responsibility can be maintained, but also as a way of housing both Mumford and Marcuse's critiques of the technological society within an alternative approach that transcends the neutrality/non-neutrality binary: namely, *technological ambiguity*.

Abbreviations

NRSV	*The NRSV Study Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989

Works by Reinhold Niebuhr:

BTR	*Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).
CLCD	*The Children of Light and Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).
FAH	*Faith and History A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949).
INCE	*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1979).
IOAH	*The Irony of American History* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).
MMIS	*Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Social Ethics and Politics* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).
NDHN	*The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume I: Human Nature* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941).
NDHD	*The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume II: Human Destiny* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943).
SDH	*The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

Works by Herbert Marcuse:

ODM	*One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964).
RAR	*Reason and Revolution* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1941).
EAC	*Eros and Civilization* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1961).

NEG *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Jeremy J. Shapiro (tr.), (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968).

Works by Lewis Mumford:

COM *The Condition of Man* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1944).

COL *The Conduct of Life* (New York, NY: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951).

MWD *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

MOM *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

POP *The Pentagon of Power* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

SFL *Sketches from Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford—Early Years* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982).

SOU *The Story of Utopias* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1922).

TAC *Technics and Civilization* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1934).

TOM *The Transformations of Man* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1956).

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Chapter 1: Prolegomena

I: Why is the Technological Society a Worthy Topic of Study in the Field of Ethics?

To ask whether it is the case that the technological society is a worthy topic of study within the field of ethics is to ask whether it is the case that technology is "neutral," and if so, in what way? If the term, "neutral," is taken to mean "having no effect" (as the field of chemistry uses the term), technology is clearly non-neutral, as it is overwhelmingly changing the modern landscape and human activity increasingly by the day. If, however, one is to imply *moral* or *ethical* neutrality, technological neutrality becomes a highly polarizing question. Does technology have any influence upon how humans behave towards one another? To judge whether it is the case that the technological society is a topic worthy of study in the field of ethics, one must first observe the relationship between technology and society: is technology ethically neutral (henceforth, simply *neutral*), and if not, in what way does technology influence ethics, political thought, and society?

In his book, *Critical Theory of Technology*, the philosopher of technology, Andrew Feenberg, argues convincingly that there are generally three schools of thought that uniquely respond to the question of technological neutrality: Instrumental Theory, Substantive Theory, and Critical Theory.[1] This section will begin by (A) explaining these three types to observe the

[1] It should be noted that this opening section is heavily dependent upon Andrew Feenberg's *Critical Theory of Technology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991) for distinguishing the typologies of Instrumental, Substantive, and Critical Theory. It should be noted that while Feenberg's work is not the definitive work on each respective approach to technology, his original contribution to the study are, according to Douglas Kellner ("Feenberg's Questioning Technology" in *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol. 18 No. 1, 2001, P. 158) his "analytic distinctions" between the differing approaches to the philosophy of technology, which "are useful in clarifying some key aspects and dimensions" of the three while analyzed alongside one another. In her article, "The Relevance of Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology to Critical Visual Literacy" (*Writing and Communication* Vol. 37, No. 3, 2007. P. 253), Katheryn M. Northcut argues that Feenberg's work is "underutilized…for its potential clarification of large social issues," and progresses to use his categories as a clarifying basis upon which her work in technological communication would develop. Thus, it should be noted that while Feenberg should be considered the prominent voice for differentiating these three philosophies, as the thesis progresses beyond its demonstration of the marked

varying approaches to the nature of technology's bearing upon ethics. Second, this section will (B) outline particular challenges unique to the technological society that are of primary concern to this thesis. Finally, this section will (C) close by exploring current Christian scholarship regarding the ethics of technology, particularly in relation to the challenges that are of primary concern to this thesis.

A. The Question of Technological Neutrality: Three Types

1. Instrumental Theory and Technological Neutrality

The instrumental view is the most widely accepted theory concerning technological neutrality.[2] In this view, technology is completely neutral and is pure instrument. This school suggests that technology is "familiar and self-evident," politically indifferent, and has an essence of universality in that it can be deployed in any society with the same basic consequences as any another.[3] At most, in a social context, technology "…signifies all the intelligent techniques by which the energies of nature and [human beings] are directed and used in satisfaction of human needs."[4] Similarly, Eric Mullis states, "…iPods, cell phones, microwaves, computers, and television sets are *just the fruits of intelligent inquiry*."[5] Effectively, technology contains within itself no valuative or ethical meaning, but rather, it is the agent who determines its worth—be it benevolent or malevolent—regarding how it is used and towards what ends.

Therefore, for the instrumentalist, the human is the master of one's technology, and any critique of technology begins and ends with how that gadget is used. It is in this way that the

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differences between the perspectives, other sources will become more central to laying a more complete foundation for each respective school under observation.

[2] Andrew Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), P. 5.

[3] Ibid, P. 5, 6

[4] John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), (Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), P. 270.

[5] Eric Mullis, "The Device Paradigm: A Consideration for a Deweyan Philosophy of Technology," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* Vol. 23 No. 2 (2009), P. 115. Emphasis added.

instrumentalist most often either takes a "use-based" approach to technology or a "design - based" approach. Regarding the former, instrumentalism asks only whether a given technology provides the best "framework" for achieving a certain end.[6] Use-based approach asks the following types of questions: is it best to use email as the primary means of communicating with co-workers? Are humans allowing cellphones to become too much of a distraction? Should people take bicycles or public transit to work? The onus is entirely placed upon the person using the technology, and the technology itself is completely controlled by its user.

Regarding design-based approach—merely a more teleological form of use-based analysis—the instrumentalist sees technology as originating "…with a view to the resolution of perceived problems."[7] This kind of teleological approach to technological critique is characterized by one's potential objection to the ends for which a particular gadget is conceived. Feenberg gives the example of reproductive technologies, such as contraception, abortion, or "test tube babies," and, in addition to these, one could also include landmines, chemical weapons, or devices created for the sole purpose of physician-assisted suicide.[8] The end for which these instruments were built may or may not be ethically objectionable, therefore the technology itself might be objectionable. However, it should be noted that this still does not attribute value to the neutral instrument, but rather it calls into question the purpose for its existence and the person responsible for creating or using it.

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[6] In an essay concerning military technology ("The Technological Culture of War" in *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* Vol. 28 No. 4, August 2008. P. 300), Joelien Pretorius describes the instrumentalist view in the following way: "The point is thus to apply the 'right' technology to obtain chosen ends.… Instrumentalism only asks whether given military technologies offer the best technological framework to enhance security in a specific context of objectively given threates."

[7] Larry A. Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2001), P. 12. Italics his; bold, mine.

[8] Feenberg, P. 6.

Regardless of either approach, the instrumentalist may engage in certain "trade-offs" where the progress and efficiency of technology is suppressed or abandoned for ethical, religious, or environmental purposes. Feenberg states, "There is a price for the achievement of environmental, ethical, or religious goals, and that price must be paid in reduced efficiency."[9] He continues: "On this account, the technical sphere can be limited by nontechnical values, but not transformed by them."[10] In other words, Instrumental Theory suggest that a society cannot reach maximum efficiency *while also* serving society's moral concerns.

Finally, Instrumental Theory has an overall tendency to consider technology as a source of progress within human development. The instrumentalist, John Dewey, views the equation as relatively simple: "…when the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means of life and not its despotic master,"[11] and all that society has to do is rid itself of the antiquated "habits" of its culture.[12] In other words, the problems of society are not due to technology, but rather it is that humanity is "lagging" behind technology in matters of "belief, desire, and purpose."[13] Effectively, ethics simply needs to "catch up" to its technological progress.

While Instrumental Theory seems quite simple, there is a significant division between types of instrumentalists. Henceforth, these different types of Instrumental theory shall be divided using the following terms: (a) "Hard Instrumentalism" and (b) "Soft Instrumentalism."[14]

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, P. 350.
[12] For a helpful essay on how Dewey sees the connection between society's ethical development and technology's progress, see: Geroges Dicker, "John Dewey: Instrumentalism in Social Action," in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* Vol. 7 Is. 4 (October 1971), P. 221-232.
[13] John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York, NY: Capricorn Books, 1963), P. 58.
[14] The categories of "Hard" and "Soft" instrumentalism are partially modified categories introduced by Niebuhr, in his essay, "Two Forms of Utopianism" (in *Christianity and Society* Vol. 12 No. 4, Autumn 1947. P. 6) to fit the school of Instrumental Theory. Niebuhr differentiates "hard" and "soft" in terms of utopianism in the following way: "Hard utopianism might be defined as the creed of those who claim to ebody the perfect community and who therefore feel themselves morally justified in using every instrument of guile or force against those who oppose their assumed perfection. Soft utopianism is the creed of those who do not claim to embody perfection, but expect perfection to emerge out of the ongoing process of history." In a similar way, Hard Instrumental Theory is defined

The difference between the two will be expounded upon in this section, but one can suffice to say that the two disagree only on the degree by which humans are uniquely influenced by a *society* which is technological. Both view the gadgets themselves as neutral, but for the "soft instrumentalists," the modern technological society carries with it a kind of thinking that is, on the one hand, necessary for the existence of such a technological society, and yet on the other hand, potentially detrimental to the human condition and culture. In other words, Soft Instrumentalism sees technology as neutral, but they do not see the technological society as neutral, while hard instrumentalists see both as harmless.

(a) Hard Instrumental Theory

A good example of Hard Instrumental Theory can be found in the work of Walter Marshall Horton.[15] Horton claims that the potential problem of technology within socio-ethical dimensions is "nonsense" and that "…no very heroic measures are needed in order to put [technology] back in [its] place," that humans must only develop a "sense of humor and proportion" to "laugh [technology] back into its rightful place."[16] Horton reasons that

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as those who are already in right standing with technology, and use of technology as instruments has no negative bearing on society. Soft Instrumental Theory shall therefore be defined as those who are not in right standing with technology, but through processes of history or a proper rational orientation towards technology, such right standing will be achieved.

[15] While Horton is unique in that his interpretation emerged contemporaneously with the other thinkers examined in this thesis, there are numerous examples of Hard Instrumental Theory. See: Simon Ramo, *Century of Mismatch* (Philadelphia, PA, D. McKay Publishers, 1970. P. vi); Melvin Kranzberg, *Technology in Western Civilization* (vol. II, New York, NY, Oxford Univ. Press, 1967. P. 705); Peter Drucker, "Technological Trends in the Twentieth Century" (in *Technology in Western Civilization,* vol. II, M. Kranzberg and C. Pursell. eds., New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1967. P. 32); Samuel Florman, *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering* (2nd Edition, New York, NY, St. Martin's Publishing, 1994. P. 61). Perhaps John Dewey is a better representative than Horton, but there are some who would question this categorization. For a good explanation of these doubts, see: Phillip Dean, "Dialectical vs. Experimental Method: Marcuse's Review of Dewey's Logic: The Theory of Inquiry" (in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* Vol. 46 No. 2, 2011. P. 242).

[16] Walter Marshall Horton, *Can Christianity Save Civilization?* (New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), P. 185-187.

technology is simply a "highly developed tool" and that this "essentially simple problem has become artificially complicated."[17]

Despite his confidence in humanity's handle on such a "simple problem," Horton curiously seems grateful that humans have figured out how to control technology. He states, "Fortunately, the development of machinery itself is now favoring its due subordination to human uses."[18] Horton points to the technological progress from the early Industrial Revolution to his current place in history[19] as proof that technology has a kind of self-correcting feature.[20] Ultimately, for Horton, the problem is not nearly as bleak as the "tearful moralists" make it out to be; in fact, it's barely worth discussing.[21]

(b) Soft Instrumental Theory

While there are those Instrumentalists like Horton who seem to "laugh" at the possibility of techno-ethical problems, there are other Instrumentalists who take a more sobering view of technology, all the while still reducing it to a mere tool that humans are capable of correcting. An example of this "soft" form of Instrumentalism is found in the work of Lewis Mumford. Mumford understands the perilous possibilities that technology wields,[22] especially through his argument that technological systems are imposed upon *individuals* within society—that society *itself* is reduced to a "machine" through an appropriation of the human being—by either the systemic abuses of those who he calls "Prime Movers,"[23] or by the willful acceptance of a particular social order.[24] Mumford maintains that the same kind of thinking—he calls

[17] Ibid, P. 183-184.
[18] Ibid, P. 186.
[19] Horton's *Can Christianity Save Civilization?* was published in 1940.
[20] Ibid, P. 186.
[21] Ibid, P. 187.
[22] TAC, P. 4.
[23] MOM, P. 163. "Prime Movers" are those in power who control the mechanized society.
[24] In POP (P. 330), Mumford calls such a willful acceptance of the social structure a "bribe."

"mechanistic thinking," a product of a kind of religious "myth of the machine"—that creates a hyper technological society *simultaneously* creates a social structure which is detrimental to humankind. [25]

However, Mumford ultimately sees technology as a neutral entity that can be rescued by a "reorientation" towards a more "organic" mode of social organization, construction, and utilization;[26] essentially, he seeks to refuse the predominant ordering structure of the technological society and seeks to establish natural, or more "organic" goals in its place. This is where Feenberg's earlier description of a "trade-off" takes place for Mumford, though its implications run deeper than simply riding a bike instead of driving a car.[27] In Mumford's view, technology has serious implications as a conduit through which power controls and the human is appropriated, and therefore argues that the redemption of technology can only take place through various cultural, philosophical, and economic shifts that will result in the more organic, technologically "scaled-back" version of society he seeks to deploy. [28]

(c) Instrumental Theory Conclusion

In the case of both Horton and Mumford, technology—no matter how docile or dominant it appears within its current context of history—can eventually be conquered. Mumford states, "The old machines will in part die out, as the great saurian died out, to be replaced by smaller, faster, brainer, and more adaptable organisms, adapted not to the mine, the battlefield and the factory, but to the positive environment of life."[29] Despite its potential perils, Mumford, Horton,

[25] A fuller explanation of the technological society structure will come in Chapter 5.
[26] For more information on "reorientation" and "organic" ideology, see TAC, P. 364-367. More on this will be covered in concert with the forthcoming chapters on Lewis Mumford.
[27] Feenberg, P. 6.
[28] TAC, P. 125
[29] Ibid, P. 428.

and the Instrumentalists view technology simply as a tool that, at worst, must be refashioned and reoriented in society for correct use.

If it is the case that technology is simply a gadget that exists independently of human beings, as Horton affirms—that it has no bearing upon social, political, or ethical concerns—then the technological society is hardly worth studying within the field of ethics, outside of how best to use an instrument and within which context. However, if the technological society is—as Mumford argues—a willful acceptance of a given social structure which imitates that of a machine, certain questions should indeed be examined within an ethical framework. Even if the instruments themselves carry no ethical value, there is an apparent social dimension Mumford observes that exists concomitantly with the technological society that is negatively affecting individuals and culture. Therefore, such a view presses the observer to analyze the extent to which the technological society's conceptual structure is impacting the way humans live and act.

2. Substantive Theory and Technological Neutrality

Unlike Instrumental Theory, Substantive theory denies the neutrality of technology. While this view is certainly a minority among theorists,[30] its most prominent adherents—Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul—are nonetheless prolific voices within philosophical, theological, and political circles. This section will investigate these two thinkers to determine if either is worth further study in the realm of ethics.

[30] Feenberg, P. 7.

(a) Martin Heidegger – The First Substantive Theorist

On the opposite end of the spectrum from Horton, Heidegger not only argues against technological neutrality, but claims that ignoring technology's implications—treating it as neutral—would be a grave mistake.[31] Heidegger states:

> Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.[32]

Heidegger argues that the sheer essence of modern technology houses within it a function of dominance that ends even with the domination of its creator: humankind.

At its core, Heidegger claims that technology is a "challenging forth" (*Herausfordern*)[33] and "setting-upon" (*Stellen)*[34] of nature; essentially one wields nature to one's own purposes through construction, organization, and exploitation. Heidegger sees that the greatest threat that this "challenging forth" and "setting-upon" poses to humankind is the transformation of nature—including human beings—into what he calls "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*);[35] essentially a state where the "truth" of the object—be it a plant, animal, or even a human—is "concealed," and the thing exists entirely for the purposes of exploitation.[36]

The human, Heidegger argues, becomes swallowed up into its own "standing-reserve." He states, "Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does

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[31] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (translated by William Lovitt, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), P. 4.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *Herausfordern* – to challenge, to call forth or summon to action, to demand positively, to provoke. Heidegger, P. 14 *fn*.
[34] *Stellen* – "to put in place, to order, to arrange, to furnish or supply, and, in a military context, to challenge or engage." Heidegger, P. 15 *fn*.
[35] *Bestand* – "Standing by, waiting for use." Heidegger, P. 17 *fn*.
[36] Ibid, P. 17.

not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve?"[37] Essentially, by its very process, the action of ordering and demystifying nature is necessarily wed to ordering and demystifying the human who orders; the very pursuit of ordering nature is a result of an already-ordered individual. This cognitive ordering, of which Heidegger calls "enframing," is essentially an epistemology that "challenges-forth" or enslaves nature[38] simply through the process of creating a new mechanical framework of understanding the world.[39] Ultimately, enframing is the cognitive process of seeing both the world and the self as standing-reserve.[40]

The real power of Heidegger's work is found in his recognition of technology, not merely as a thing or noun that exists independently from humans like Horton argues, but rather as a verb; technology is something humans are actively doing. In fact, Heidegger argues that understanding technology as mere instrument is precisely the problem. He states, "So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology."[41] Essentially, technology is not an instrument; it is an ethic—something humans do. Placing technology within this category gives it immediate ethical, social, and political significance.

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[37] Ibid. P. 18.
[38] In his book, *The Gods and Technology* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2006. P. 71), Heideggerian scholar, Richard Rojcewicz, argues that Heidegger's understanding of "challenging" could hold within it a double meaning that alludes to ancient forms of slavery—that technology is effectively the enslavement of nature. He states, "For Heidegger, not only is modern technology a challenging, it is a dishonourable one; nature is given no chance to defend itself and is instead forced to give satisfaction."
[39] *Ge-stell* – "a framework of calling-forth, a challenging claim…that 'gathers' so as to reveal." Heidegger, P. 19 *fn.*
[40] In "Worlds Apart in the Curriculum: Heidegger, technology, and the poietic attunement of literature" (*Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 44, No. 5, 2012: P. 506), J.M. Magrini states, "*Enframing*…is always already at work coloring the way the world reveals itself, and this includes…the ways in which we envision our selfhood through our interpersonal dealings with others…. Viewing existence through the lens of *Enframing*, we are driven to quantify our entire existence…"
[41] Heidegger, P. 18.

In the earlier stages of his writing, namely, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger has a more hopeful approach to this problem. He states, "Thus the coming to presence of technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power."[42] However, shortly before his death, Heidegger forebodingly declares, "Only a god can save us now,"[43] implying the deterministic essence of technology and, ultimately, its hidden malevolent fate.

(b) Jacques Ellul – Technological Autonomy

Jacques Ellul, the second prominent Substantive theorist, is especially fatalistic in his articulation of technology from the outset. He states:

> …technology ultimately depends only on itself, it maps its own route, it is a prime and not a secondary factor, it must be regarded as an 'organism' tending toward closure and self-determination: it is an end in itself. Autonomy is the very condition of technological development.[44]

It is important to note that Ellul does not say that technology as an instrument is autonomous—how a clock or a windmill runs on its own—but rather that technological *development* is autonomous.[45] Ellul's analysis of technology is that there is another dimension, which he calls "technique," that comprises the whole of culture and technological development within it.[46] To

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[42] Ibid, P. 32.
[43] From an interview with *Der Spiegel*, "Only a God can Save Us Now" (translated by D. Schendler, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal,* vol. 6, no. 1, Winter 1977).
[44] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System* (translated by Joachim Neugroschel, New York, NY, Continuum Publishing, 1980), P. 125.
[45] Lawrence Agbemabiese and John Byrne describe a rather horrifying example of Ellul's technological autonomy, as the imposition of technique, he argues, ravaged the newly liberated Ghana. They argue that technologizing a postcolonial, developing country like Ghana creates new problems that only technology can solve, thus further entrenching the country within the technological system. In their article, "Commodification of Ghana's Volta River: An Example of Ellul's Autonomy of Technique" (*Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2005. P. 17), They state, "Ghanaians are today living—and suffering—from the fact that the magnitude and complexity of problems created by the VRP [Volta River Project] and similar modernist projects tend to exceed the capacity of its specialists to solve…. In this respect, Ghana's energy fiasco, unfortunately, illustrates an alarming detail the Ellulian problem of *autonomous technique*."
[46] Ellul: "Technique is the complex and complete milieu in which human beings must live, and in relation to which they must define themselves. It is a universal mediator, producing a generalised mediation, totalizing and aspiring to totality." ("The Search for Ethics in a Technicist Society," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 1989. P. 23)

Ellul, technique is all-encompassing and "omnivorous,"[47] consuming society piece by piece. He states, "What we are witnessing at the moment is a rearrangement of the world in an intermediate stage; the change is not in the use of natural force but in the application of technique to all spheres of life."[48] Similar to Heidegger's *enframing*, for Ellul, technique is the epistemological process of turning society itself into a machine – "systematization, unification, and clarification…applied to everything."[49]

In Ellul's form of Substantive Theory, humans, science, politics, economics, and culture have all become absorbed into technique. Not only is technology far from neutral, it is actively pursuing everything to specialize and systematize—turning everything into a gear in the machine. Ellul states, "We can be confident that the final result will be that technique will assimilate everything to the machine." This is seemingly the end result of Heidegger's thought: humans have become "standing-reserve." Ellul concludes this sentiment by stating:

> But when technique enters into every area of life, including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance…. [it] is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs him…. This transformation, so obvious in modern society, is the result of the fact that technique has become autonomous.[50]

According to the Substantive Theorists, the outlook on human progress is "apocalyptic"[51] and may seem absurd to many because it is attributing seemingly "magical powers to technology."[52]

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[47] Ellul, *Technological Society*, P. 10
[48] Ibid, P. 42.
[49] Ibid, P. 43.
[50] Ibid, P. 6.
[51] In his article, "Critique: New Demons" (*Sojourners* 5, November, 1976. P. 37), Dale Brown calls this apocalyptic-style writing, "[Ellul's] Amos-like ministry to the technological society."
[52] Feenberg, P. 7.

However, the apparent correlations between the technological society and a loss of meaningful relationships,[53] dialogue,[54] and civic duty[55] do seem, nevertheless, significant.

(c) Substantive Theory Conclusion

Perhaps Substantive theory's greatest contribution to the study of technology's role within society is that it articulates a new dimension of its influence. There seems to be a much more powerful force that lies underneath technology than what appears on its surface as a simple gadget or tool. If, according to Heidegger, technology is a statement about the person who creates it, then modern technology says something about the culture that creates it, and this web of interests and patterns do seem to pose alarming implications for ethical, political, and social discourse. Viewing technology as something humans do—and as something that creates humans as much as humans create it (*standing reserve*)—appears to open up a new need for self-awareness and critique.

However, upon closer examination, what the Substantive theorist makes up for regarding technology's ethical dimensions, it lacks all the more regarding the *ethical* dimensions of the human it perceives. Particularly, when it comes to the question of what the human must do now,

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[53] Feenberg gives the example of "fast food" and how its availability is seemingly weakening the family ritual of eating together at the dinner table. (P. 7)

[54] A study called, "Social Media and the 'Spiral of Silence'," www.pewinternet.org/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/ (Pew Research Internet Project, 26 August, 2014), found that "86% of Americans were willing to have an in-person conversation about the [United States'] surveillance program, but just 42% of Facebook and Twitter users were willing to post about it on those platforms." Given that this is a particularly controversial topic (47% in favor, 44% against), it was articulated that Facebook and Twitter actually discouraged dialogue out of the fear of disagreement among "friends" and "followers" respectively, where in-person dialogue remained relatively the same despite the fear of disagreement.

[55] In a Slate.com article titled "Where Have All the Flower Children Gone?" www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_big_idea/2006/12/where_have_all_the_flower_children_gone.html (Slate.com, 13 December, 2006) Jacob Weisberg cites technological "breakthroughs in field medicine" as a possible reason that public protests against the Iraq War never reached the level of those during the Vietnam War. His reasoning is that despite the fact that Americans came out against the Iraq War more quickly than the Vietnam War, technology's ability to preserve life made the costs of war seem less detrimental and less deserving of outrage and immediate action.

the Substantive theorist is utterly paralyzed; the human the Substantive theorist articulates is completely powerless, if not fully integrated into the technological society itself.

For the Substantive theorist, the ability to undo what has been done in the technological society is ultimately futile. While Heidegger exhibits a small amount of hope, albeit earlier in his career, Ellul is utterly terrifying in his description from the start: "No human activity is possible except as it is mediated and censored by the technical medium…. Thought or will can only be realized by borrowing from technique its modes of expression. Not even the simplest initiative can have an original, independent existence."[56] To Ellul, all human activity and decision-making reflects the technological society, and the human is never free or separate from the machine.[57]

For Ellul, like Heidegger, "only a God can save us now," however, Ellul takes this quite literally. Ellul states, "For the world ought to be preserved by God's methods, not by man's technical work (which can, however, be used by God and form part of his activity, on condition that men bring the whole sphere of technics under his judgment and his control)."[58] Effectively, Ellul imagines an eschatological event that will bring all things into appropriate order by way of God acting through the Christian revolutionary. For Ellul, a kind of divine invasion is needed to rescue humankind and the world.

In conclusion, the substantive theorist imagines a paralyzed human subjected to the technological society; paralyzed in will, the scope of its capacity for self and environmental consideration, and the trajectory of history. In diametric opposition to Horton's hard neutrality, the substantive theorist views humans as being completely enveloped within the technological

[56] Ellul, *Technological Society*, P. 418.
[57] Ibid, P. 410-420.
[58] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Colorado Springs, CO, Helmers & Howard, 1967), P. 16.

system—consciousness included. In the words of Rupert Hall commenting on the work of Ellul, "If he is right, his book is useless."[59] Essentially, a theology where God alone fulfills the tasks of good in an evil world is not ethics; it is a spiritually justified nihilism.

3. Critical Theory and Technological Neutrality

Critical theory largely sees itself as charting a path between the two extremes posed by Instrumental Theory and Substantive Theory. To do this, Critical Theory unites both extremes by analyzing one common flaw. Feenberg states, "Despite their differences, instrumental and substantive theories share a 'take it or leave it' attitude towards technology."[60] Technology is either void of meaning outside of pure utilization (Instrumental), or so full of meaning that it consumes all understanding of history, politics, and values (Substantive). Technology either has no meaning or totalizing meaning, and neither seek revolution *within* the current technological system. Critical Theory seeks to change that.

To chart its path between opposites, Critical Theory does not reject either type entirety. On the one hand, while Critical Theory rejects the fatalism of Substantive Theory, it embraces Instrumental Theory's seemingly more transcendent view of humanity over technology, or at least free enough from it that humans can change it; something *can* be done to steer technology as it currently exists into the right direction. On the other hand, Critical Theory rejects Hard Instrumental Theory's conception of complete technological neutrality and argues instead that ethics and politics are guided by "technological rationality," which is similar to Heidegger's "enframing."[61]

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[59] Ruper Hall quoted in Clifford G. Christians, "Ellul on Solution: An Alternative but No Prophesy," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), eds. Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, P. 147.
[60] Feenberg, P. 8.
[61] This concept will be described at-length in Chapters 6 and 7.

Ultimately, the place where Critical Theory argues that a transformation of technology can take place is in the political realm. Critical theory posits that every technological instrument is constructed through the interaction between socially-bound individuals with their society's economic and political ends, and it is therefore impossible to create a fundamentally different form of technology without also radically "redesigning" the political structure.[62] Therefore, Critical Theory engages in what can be described as "political redesign."

However, within the redesigning process, critical theorists are often stifled by the two extremes they seek to evade. While many critical theorists take up the task to "redesign" modern technology through political change, most stop short of actually creating a new operational structure.[63] Many of the problems relating to Critical Theory's ability to restructure a political medium that can restructure the technological society revolve around the tendency to slip into Substantive or Instrumental approaches. For instance, concerning the former, Herbert Marcuse, though perhaps the most constructive of all critical theorists, becomes so successful in his critique of the all-pervasive dominance of the capitalist-driven technological society that his very arguments can appear self-defeating; the words he uses are merely a part of the "technical rationality" he seeks to articulate and resolve.[64] Concerning the latter, known critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, for instance, seeks to separate the actions of *labor* and *interaction*, granting his argument an individual that transcends both categories by embodying both and then is capable of expression through either avenue,[65] but the laborer in and of itself has a tendency of slipping into a mere "instrumental" view that lacks ethical and political significance, leaving him

[62] Ibid., P. 13.
[63] Ibid.
[64] This critique will be fully explored in Chapter 7.
[65] See: Habermas, Jürgen, "Labor and Interaction: Comment on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*," in *Theory and Practice*, John Viertel, tr., (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), P. 142-169.

vulnerable to the same critiques leveled against Instrumentalist Theory.[66] For many, the path between these two extremes seemingly stifles nearly any theory of reconstruction all together; Michel Foucault, for instance, introduces a new critique of "power" by allegorically expanding a form of imprisonment known as the "panopticon"[67] to observe a new way technology is used to control (surveillance, isolation, and controlled research), but his articulation of resistance[68] and how to go about restructuring remains "vague."[69]

4. Conclusion

Thus, the way technology is neutral or non-neutral is the deciding factor concerning whether the technological society is a topic worthy of study in the field of ethics. Of the four different perspectives covered—including the hard/soft bifurcation of Instrumental Theory—two approaches appear *unhelpful* for the ethical study of the technological society and two appear *helpful* and potentially *constructive*. Those who appear unhelpful are the Hard Instrumental theorists and the Substantive theorists, and those who appear helpful and constructive are the Soft Instrumental theorists and the Critical Theorists.

If it is the case that technology is completely neutral (Hard Instrumental Theory)—if technology is mere instrument without any related social effects or ethical implications to culture—the only bearing technology has upon ethics is how best to use a given gadget within a given culture. On the other hand, if technology is non-neutral but has such a complete and

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[66] Egbert Schuurman, *Technology and the Future: A Philosophical Challenge*, Herbert Donald Morton (tr.), (Toronto, ON: Wedge Publishing, 1980), P. 256-257

[67] For a more detailed description, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (translated by Alan Sheridan, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977), P. 195-228. For the original idea of the panopticon as applied to prison systems, see: Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 1995).

[68] Foucault's answer to the panopticon is what he describes as the festival, which boasts "suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear." However, Foucault makes no attempt to argue exactly how one is to restructure panopticism so as to create the festival.

[69] Feenberg, P. 67.

totalizing affect upon culture (Heidegger/Ellul's Substantive Theory) that it consumes all mindfulness and critical power, perhaps prayer is more valuable than an ethical analysis of the unavoidable and impending apocalypse.

It is for this reason that this thesis will deal primarily with those thinkers who both (1) recognize and discern the perils of the technological society, yet (2) do not fall victim to fatalism. The primary research of this thesis will not engage with writers who, like Horton, "laugh" about the apparent technological problems within society, nor will it engage with those prophets of doom (Heidegger/Ellul) who effectively "cry" about the problems of the technological society. Rather, this thesis will primarily engage with those who take the problems of the technological society seriously, do not submit to fatalism, and thus are capable of creating constructive ways forward with which one is able to dialogue: namely, the Soft Instrumental Theory of Lewis Mumford, and the Critical Theory of Herbert Marcuse—who is considered the Frankfurt School's most ardent critic of technology.[70]

B. Ethical Challenges of the Technological Society

There is no shortage of use-based analyses regarding ethics within the technological society. The impact of social media, drone warfare, big data and privacy, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence are just a handful of topics which currently populate current scholarship regarding ethics.[71] These are no doubt monumental challenges that contemporary

[70] In his essay, "Groundwork for the Concept of Technique in Education," (in *Policy Futures in Education* Vol. 4 No. 1, 2006. P. 63), Clayton Pierce rightly distinguishes Marcuse as being the most concentrated Critical Theorist on the subject of technology. He states, "Of the…Frankfurt School theorists it was Herbert Marcuse who relentlessly studied the role of technology and its impact on civilization."

[71] For excellent primers on the use-based ethical analyses of social media, drone warfare, big data and privacy, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence, see the following publications, respectively: Zhanna Bagdasarov, April Martin, Rahul Chauhan, and Shane Connelly, "Aristotle, Kant, and…Facebook? A Look at the Implications of Social Media on Ethics," in *Ethics & Behavior* Vol. 27 No. 7 (2017), P. 547-561; Kenneth Himes, *Drones and the Ethics of Targeted Killing* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015); Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing,

society faces and will face increasingly over the next decade, if not century. However, what ultimately dictates the way humans posture themselves towards these questions are fundamental presuppositions regarding the relationship between humans and their instruments. The greatest challenge to ethics within the technological society, therefore, is how one should consider three mutually reinforcing variables: (1) the implications of the technological neutrality v. non-neutrality binary, (2) the implications of how one posits human nature within the technological society, and above all else, (3) how one is to maintain ethical responsibility in the technological society. This section will pose the interrelationship between these three in order to show how this thesis will uniquely respond to the challenges of the technological society.

1. The Effects of the Neutrality/Non-Neutrality Binary

As the previous section demonstrated, the question of technological neutrality can be answered in a limited number of ways, but to be clear, the unique challenge this thesis seeks to address is not simply to do with one's inability to clearly establish whether technology is neutral or non-neutral. Rather, the challenge is that by establishing any concrete stance in either direction, one further complicates one's perspective on ethics. The challenge is found in the *implications* of taking a clear side on the binary itself.

On the one hand, if one insists that humanity is the master of technology as a neutral instrument, one must at minimum admit the limitations of humanity which first impelled such technology. Humans lack greater sight, so they invent the telescope; humans are drawn to supplement a limited and spatially dictated community with a seemingly unlimited and deliberately crafted social media; humans are moved to partially transcend their natural limits to

2016); Tami Ball, "The Ethics of Genetics" in *American Medical Writers Association Journal* Vol. 32 Is. 4 (Winter 2017), P. 182-184; Amitai Etzioni and Oren Etzioni, "Incorporating Ethics into Artificial Intelligence," in *Journal of Ethics* Vol. 21 Is. 4 (December 2017), P. 403-418.

understand the world with search engines that retrieve seemingly limitless collections of data in a nanosecond. Technology reveals the power of humankind, but it also continues to reveal new ways the human is limited without it. The very existence of technology at once reveals the human's capacity to create *and*, to some extent, the human's *dependence* upon their creation in order to maintain or advance their current abilities, especially when those abilities are in some way attached to one's livelihood or economic stability. In a technological society where its instruments are ubiquitous, the human's dependence grows proportionally to its uses and ubiquity.

While this apparent vexation does not disprove technological neutrality, it should at minimum dispel the instrumentalist of the illusion that one is entirely the master of one's technology and is, to varying degrees, *dependent* upon technology to supplement their natural limitations. Furthermore, when one assumes technological neutrality and denies the potential impact that technology is having on one's life, one is tempted to ignore the ways in which that dependence is influencing one's behavior and philosophical presumptions. What is wrong with the view of technological neutrality is not necessarily the claim in itself, but what that claim falsely permits by what it implies: that humans are in fact masters over their technology when one is simultaneously quite dependent upon it.

On the other hand, if one insists that humanity is influenced by technology as a *non-neutral* entity, one must at minimum admit that the creativity and reach of technology reflects humanity's capacity for enlarging one's sphere of influence, freedom, and possibility. Even the most hardened Substantive theorists entrust the printing press to disseminate their ideas to all corners of the world, and one cannot deny that the boundaries of nature, geography, and communication are expanding at the very moment humans *appear* most enslaved.

Likewise, while this apparent vexation does not prove technological neutrality, it should at minimum dispel the substantivist of the illusion that he or she is entirely a slave to technology and is indeed, to varying degrees, capable of transcending one's natural and social constraints through its creation and usage. Furthermore, however, when one fully embraces the idea that technology is non-neutral, and that it does indeed have an impact on society and ethics, one is invariably tempted to misinterpret the rapid progression and ubiquity of technology as inevitably totalizing in its effects. When one conflates the ubiquity of technology with technology's social and ethical effects, one invariably removes freedom and agency. Ultimately, the position of non-neutrality tempts one either towards determinism or towards an all-or-nothing plan of salvation.

Therefore, the first challenge of understanding ethics in the technological society is to establish a way of talking about technology that does not minimize its effects to the point of naïve apathy, nor maximize its effects to the point of hopeless resignation. In either extreme, technological ethics is a vain pursuit. Rather, this thesis seeks to develop a new type—a new way of talking about the question of technological neutrality—in order to overcome this two-sided challenge. For this reason, this thesis will examine two thinkers who construct ways of dealing with this challenge without entirely committing either error: Lewis Mumford, an instrumentalist who affirms technological neutrality while also remaining especially critical of the technological society, and Herbert Marcuse, a critical theorist who denies technological neutrality without submitting to a hopeless determinism.

2. Human Nature within the Technological Society

The second challenge of the technological society this thesis will examine relates to how humans should consider themselves within the technological society; specifically, should the human consider him or herself as subject or object? Is the human in the technological society a

rational, tool-making being who is shaping and acting upon technology, or is technology itself shaping and acting upon the human being? This challenge is similar to the first in that the question tends to present itself as a binary, but has significant implications once one position is clearly established in either direction.

If it is the case that the human is pure subject, that he or she transcends nature and freely acts upon technology, one is tempted to interpret technology as something that is manageable and neutral. On the other hand, if one were to insist that the human is pure object, that he or she is historically, sociologically, or economically determined, one is tempted to place human beings entirely under the influence of technological progress itself. How one perceives oneself ultimately shapes the way in which one perceives the technological society. Thus, to speak of technology is to speak of anthropology. [72]

Therefore, it is central to note, that no matter which view one has regarding the neutrality or non-neutrality of technology, whichever way one positions the self and human nature ultimately dictates the presumed effects or non-effects of technology, whether explicitly or implicitly. Particularly, as will be argued in this thesis, while Mumford and Marcuse seem astutely aware of the pitfalls of their presumed stance on the first challenge regarding technological neutrality, and both can remain critical without succumbing to resignation, this thesis will show that their flat constructions of the self and human nature betray their conclusions, and compound the problem in a way that leads each towards an implicit determinism, even if they reject such determinism superficially.

[72] The term "anthropology" throughout is defined simply as "the study of human beings" and is to be understood in the broadest sense. It is to include the biological, social, and psychological studies of human beings, as well as those examinations which permeate the humanities. For a more comprehensive discussion and analysis of the term, see Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes' (eds.) *Rationality and Relativism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).

Ultimately, what is needed as a base for Mumford and Marcuse is a view of self and human nature which does not betray their uneasy relationship with the question of technological neutrality; one that can maintain their critical relationship with technology without succumbing to paralysis or resignation. It is for this reason, therefore, that this thesis will utilize the Christian anthropology of Reinhold Niebuhr to grant a dimension to each thinker's view of human nature that better situates the self in relation to technology.

3. Ethical Responsibility within the Technological Society

The final and central challenge of the technological society this thesis will address deals with the topic of ethical responsibility.[73] Ethical responsibility can be crudely defined as "the sense of being accountable for and accountable to"[74] an object or an action under one's control.[75] Thus, the challenge of ethical responsibility within the technological society is establishing what is under one's control, to what degree, and whether or not one should be held accountable for and to it.

To properly address this challenge, the nexus of the previous two challenges must be properly understood in relation to one another. What are the ways in which technology has an effect upon human beings, if at all, what are the limits of human control over those effects, and

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[73] In "Technology and the Ethics of Responsibility" (*Metanexus*, September 2011), Egbert Schuurman defines ethical responsibility as "…the sense of being accountable for and accountable to…" and describes such a "sense" within the technological society in the following way: "[E]veryone involved in scientific-technological development must act as proxy or steward with reference to one another." While this definition is preliminarily helpful, this thesis will include *all* who are integrated in the technological society—all who create and use technology—not simply those who develop technology. This thesis will refer to ethical responsibility within the technological society as a sense that all humans "must act as a proxy or steward with reference to one another."

[74] Ibid.

[75] This thesis presumes two Kantian maxims which relate to the grounding of ethical responsibility: first, that the sense of ought is a *disposition* that serves as the "ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims," that it is a "property of the will," and that it is grounded in nature or freedom (*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, tr., New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1960. P. 20-21) . Secondly, this thesis presumes that "…the idea of an ought or of duty indicates a possible action" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, J.M.D. Meiklejohn, tr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003, P. 308); in other words, ethical responsibility implies a disposition which has adopted a maxim that one is *capable of doing*: i.e. "ought implies can."

to what degree is the human accountable to and for those effects? If one were to take too extreme a view regarding either binary (neutrality and human-as-subject/non-neutrality and human-as-object) one would eliminate ethical responsibility altogether by either removing technology too far from the realm of ethics (the former), or imagining its effects as being so totalizing that humans have little or no control (the latter).

It is therefore imperative to investigate the ways in which both overconfidence and distrust regarding the human's control over technology plays a role in assigning ethical responsibility in the technological society. While Mumford and Marcuse maintain a helpful uneasiness about the question of technological neutrality, this thesis will demonstrate that their presumptions regarding human nature eliminate ethical responsibility from the outset. It is for this reason, once again, that Niebuhr's construction of the self and human nature will be utilized to grant Mumford and Marcuse a base from which ethical responsibility, or what he calls, the "uneasy conscience," can emerge.[76]

II: Recent Christian and Niebuhrian Scholarship in Relation to the Ethical Challenges of the Technological Society

In addition to utilizing Reinhold Niebuhr as a resource for both his anthropology and his construction of ethical responsibility, this thesis will also borrow from Niebuhr's Christian Realist methodology, which goes hand-in-hand with each, and will be expounded upon more in Chapter 2. Using Niebuhr's methodology to develop the thought of Mumford and Marcuse renders this thesis a work specifically of *Christian* ethics, and brings a theological critique to the philosophy of technology.

[76] In his essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr" (in *The WileyBlackwell Companion to Political Theology*, William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Manley Scott eds., Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2019. P. 188), William Werpehowski states, "How can anyone deny that Niebuhr's is the quintessential example of a political ethic of free responsibility?"

With a view towards the various challenges this thesis will principally address, this section will accomplish two things. First, (A) this section will examine current Christian scholarship regarding the question of technological neutrality and show what has been accomplished regarding the challenges this thesis seeks to address, and what has not. Second, (B) this section will show how this thesis will utilize Reinhold Niebuhr and how this thesis fits within current scholarship regarding Reinhold Niebuhr.

A. Recent Christian Scholarship Regarding the Challenges Presented

The Christian community's response to the technological society has overwhelmingly taken the form of Instrumental restraint (Mumford-influenced), Substantive despair (Ellul or Heidegger-influenced), or some kind of mixture of the two (Substantive/Instrumental hybrid). Consequently, no current scholarship addresses the challenges regarding their presumed stance on the binary of neutrality/non-neutrality and human nature, and none address the implications of such views on ethical responsibility. However, like Mumford and Marcuse, two subgroups, namely the Soft Instrumental theorists and Substantive/Instrumental hybrids, do seem moderately aware of the pitfalls of the neutrality/non-neutrality binary and make some attempt to steer clear of them.

This section will serve as a review of the most recent scholarship in order to show where the research of this thesis fits, first turning to (1) Christian Instrumental theorists (Hard and Soft), then (2) Christian Substantive theorists (proper and hybrid). This section will close, however, with one recent essay which appears to open a different approach, though still falls short in a number of important ways: (3) technology as ambiguous instrument.

1. Christian Instrumental Theorists

Regarding Instrumental Theory, and following in line with the contrast between Horton and Mumford, Instrumental Theory can be divided within contemporary Christian scholarship along the lines of "Hard" and "Soft" instrumentalism. The former maintains ethical considerations of technology that are purely use-based, only having an effect to the extent the user deems appropriate. The latter understands that technological thinking within a society can have negative consequences, but it is primarily a social issue, not a problem of technology. Both, however, result in some kind of advocacy for a trade-off between efficiency and morality or spirituality.

There have been seven recent articles which reflect a Hard Instrumental view of technology.[77] The first five articulate a simple trade-off between efficiency and spirituality, while the latter two go a bit further as to say that technology can be an addictive activity. Nancy J. Duff, Peter Fleming, Colleen Maura McGrane, Jeff Vogel, and Rodney Clapp all argue along similar lines from each other, that technology can have a detrimental impact upon oneself only insofar as one allows it. Duff likens social media relations to the invention of the telephone, that it would silly to reject it just because "…only face-to-face encounters [matter]."[78] But she argues there is a wealth of benefits that could be had if only the church learned to better use it. Fleming understands technology to be at most an occasion for idolatry, but makes clear that it should not be associated too closely with technology itself. He states, "The idols have shifted into our hands, our pockets. Who needs a *lararium* when you have a laptop?"[79] His resolution is to simply know when it is becoming an idol, and instead turn to God. Similar to Fleming, McGrane

[77] "Recent" is considered to go back at least to the year 2010.
[78] Nancy J. Duff, "Praising God Online," in *Theology Today* Vol. 70 No. 1 (2013), P. 28.
[79] Peter Fleming, "The Spiritual Case Against the Mobile Office," in *America* Vol. 220 Is. 4 (February 2019), P. 50.

wishes to grow one's consciousness more in how Christians allow technology to encroach upon their time for spiritual disciplines. She states, "We can foster mindfulness of God by being aware of our proclivity for online drifting, praying when clicking online…and choosing specific times to set our phones aside and be wholly present to God."[80] Similarly to McGrane, Vogel warns of technology becoming a distraction that humans deploy at will, but one which is easily overcome if one is self-aware and disciplined. He concludes, "…we might be wise to view this impulse as the latest invention of the noonday demon."[81] Slightly different in perspective, Clapp sees prayer as the very solution to the human's various technological misgivings rather than the potential cost. He argues, "It makes sense that we pray for the right use…of computer technology. Sometimes these may be prayers of anxiety and desperation, just as farmers pray for rain [in, sic] the midst of a drought."[82] All of these scholars, much like Horton, are aware of various use-based problems brought about by technology, but they interpret them as correctable, so long as the human stays engaged. For these individuals, technology is not the problem, it is the human's self-control, spirituality, and wisdom that is potentially the problem.

The second group of Hard Instrumentalists are distinguished only by the extent to which they see Christians allowing technology to impact their lives, and both scholars understand it in terms of technological addiction. Tony Reinke, in his book, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, argues—despite the misleading title—that phones do not change the person but simply provide a new way old sins can emerge. In particular, Reinke argues throughout the book that self-addiction, harkening to the myth of Narcissus, is a growing trend among Christians given the

[80] Colleen Maura McGrane, "Practising Presence: Wisdom from the Rule on Finding Balance in a Digital Age," in *American Benedictine Review* Vol. 64 Is. 4 (December 2013), P. 383.
[81] Jeff Vogel, "Manufactured Disruption: Why We Keep Checking Our Phones," in *Christian Century* Vol. 132 No. 13 (June 2015), P. 12.
[82] Rodney Clapp, "Blessed Technology," in *Christian Century* (January 2013), P. 45.

reward feature of social media and texts messages ("likes" and "dings"). But Reinke makes clear that "When we talk about 'smartphone addiction,' often what we are talking about is the addiction of looking at ourselves."[83] Similarly, Andrew Scott observe that, as a camp counselor, both children and adults demonstrate symptoms of "withdrawal" from their technological addictions on the very first day of "unplugging." He especially laments the problem among adults, stating, "While most counselors comply with the policy that forbids Internet use while on duty…most of them spend their off-hours online."[84] While both scholars go further than the previous Hard Instrumentalists in articulating technology's addictive permeations, it is still a matter of self-control and wisdom, not technology itself.

Outside of the very use-based approaches to technology advocated by the Hard Instrumentalists, the Soft Instrumentalists are more insightful regarding the philosophical underpinnings of the technological society, offering heavier theological themes throughout their work, but still maintaining the position that technology is itself neutral. There are two thinkers in recent scholarship who uniquely approach the technological society's more philosophical bases with theological insights: Derek C. Schuurman and Marc J. de Vries.

In his book, *Shaping a Digital World*, Derrek Schuurman lays out a description of how the Christian is to positively approach the technological society. As the title would suggest, Schuurman sees it as the Christian's obligation to actively shape the technological society in order to align technology more with the Kingdom of God. He argues this approach should be "A distinct cultural activity in which human beings exercise freedom and responsibility in response to God, to unfold the hardware and software possibilities in creation with the aid of tools and

[83] Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* (Weaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2017), P. 110.
[84] Andrew Scott, "Unplugged at Church Camp: Tech Detox," in *Christian Century* (August 2011), P. 13.

procedures for practical purposes."[85] Similar to a kind of technological social gospel movement,[86] Schuurman sees the church as poised to proactively confront the technological society as a way of assimilating its own values into culture. While Schuurman admittedly claims to reject technological neutrality, his understanding of the concept seems confused. He states, "Computer technology is not neutral; it can either be directed in ways that comport well with God's intentions for his world or in rebellious ways."[87] This description, it should be noted, is not technological non-neutrality. Schuurman is still placing agency and the effects of technology completely in the realm of those who "direct" technology, which is consistent with Instrumental Theory's claim of technological neutrality; technology is not bad, but those who direct it can be. Effectively, for Schuurman, technology is guidable, and it is the church's obligation to do that guiding towards the benefit of the Kingdom.

De Vries offers a very helpful essay to modern Christian scholarship, initially critiquing a common refrain among some secular writers that the utopian sentiments that are so often attached to technology derive from the Christian conception of paradise. De Vries astutely argues that such an oversimplification ignores a more dominant theme within the Christian tradition, which is sin. De Vries uses his critique then as an opportunity to establish a new way of understanding technology based upon the Christian conception of a sinful world. While his starting place regarding sin should be praised for its distinctiveness, he ultimately makes the same gesture as Schuurman in that he rests Christian engagement on the presumption that

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[85] Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), P. 23.
[86] Walter Rauschenbusch, who is largely considered the progenitor of the Social Gospel Movement, argued in his book, *Christianizing the Social Order* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011. P. 67, 69) describes its tenets in the following way: "The purpose of all that Jesus said and did and hoped to do was always the social redemption of the entire life of the human race on earth.… Christianity set out with a great social ideal. The live substance of the Christian religion was the hope of seeing a divine social order established on earth."
[87] Ibid., P. 65.

technology is entirely manageable and redeemable simply through a better worldview. He states, "Instead of trying to realize a utopia, a Christian perspective should be aimed at developing technologies for an imperfect world."[88] In this way, his analysis is even narrower than Schuurman's, placing the onus exclusively on Christian engineers, effectively summoning them towards a trade-off of less efficiency for more socially and ethically aware ends.

In conclusion, due to their presumptions regarding the question of technological neutrality, none of these Christian thinkers view technology itself as something that is actively changing oneself. The human is the master over technology; therefore, one simply needs correct thinking to properly put technology back in its rightful place. If there is a problem, these thinkers would argue, that problem would exist without technology just as easily. Technology has no effect on ethical responsibility, the human is always transcendent enough to direct it.

Though it should be noted that the Soft Instrumentalism of Schuurman and de Vries imagine that the technological society itself has some impact on the person. Like Mumford, both are capable of maintaining a critical spirit about them as they approach the technological society, even if the gadgets in themselves pose no direct impact to human behavior. De Vries in particular is notable in that he grants a new dimension to technology in that he suggests a better orientation that is mindful of human sin. However, both appear content with the presumption that humans are masters of technology, and neither address the problem of ethical responsibility in relation to that presumption.

[88] Marc J. de Vries, "Utopian Thinking in Contemporary Technology Versus Responsible Technology for an Imperfect World," in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* Vol. 64 No. 1 (March 2012), P. 17.

2. Christian Substantive Theorists

In recent scholarship, there are eight Christian works which can be situated within the position of Substantive Theory.[89] While all eight ascribe to Substantive positions, the latter four try to create a hybrid between Substantive and Instrumental theory. While it could be argued that the latter four are more in-line with Critical Theory, there are too many significant differences that make such categorization ill-founded.[90] This section will review these recent works in order to further show how this thesis fits within contemporary scholarship, first examining the Christian Substantive theorists, then those who articulate a type of Substantive/Instrumental hybrid.

The first four scholars who demonstrate a more direct Substantive approach to technology are Shane Hipps, Albert Borgmann, Craig M. Gay, and John Dyer. In his book, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, Hipps is very clear that technology does indeed shape one's faith, and that it is permeating every part of one's understanding and existence. In this way, he sees technology's complete change of oneself as absolute. He argues even that "God's unchanging message has changed, is changing and will change."[91] Instead of offering a careful analysis of what Christians are to do, Hipps simply states, "…it's about training our eyes to see things we usually overlook."[92] Thus, Hipps uses this thin opening of self-awareness to build his book upon; simply trying to make his readers aware of the ways

[89] These are the major works that can be categorized as Christian Substantive Theory since 2009, with the addition of Borgmann (2003) for his continuing influence on the field.
[90] As will be shown, the Christian Substantive/Instrumental hybrid all maintain that the technological society is at best a closing realm of Christian action, if it is not already closed entirely. These views make philosophical concessions to the technological society which appear similar to Critical Theory, and construct liturgical means of carving out the realm of Christian action exclusively within the church that appears in some ways similar to Critical Theory's goal of political redesign. However, these Christian hybrid positions are more dualistic, fashioning an evil technological world "out there" and a safe liturgical design that is free from its dehumanization "in here," i.e. the church.
[91] Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), P. 13.
[92] Ibid., P. 14.

technology is changing everything by examining many forms of technology and how they are changing the way humans understand, love, act, and have faith. Hipps' understanding of self appears completely absorbed into the technological process.

Borgmann, who is appropriately categorized as "neo-Heideggerian,"[93] argues that the entire technological society is governed by what he calls, "the device paradigm," which is rapidly absorbing or jettisoning all which is holy. He states, "…reality today is ruled by the device paradigm and therefore inhospitable to the holy…. Thus as Christians we must be concerned to strengthen reverence and piety wherever we find it…."[94] This statement of desperation is consistent with the mood and philosophical presuppositions all throughout Borgmann's work. Like Heidegger, Borgmann's human being waits as "standing reserve," moments away from complete absorption into the technological society, but one must hold on tightly to Christian piety as long as one can.

Similar to Borgmann's "device paradigm," in his book, *Modern Technology and the Human Future*, Gay criticizes the "instrumentalism, functionalism, and engineering mentality"[95] which objectifies nature and human beings. Drawing on Heidegger's understanding of "enframing," Gay traces the evil and deterministic qualities of the technological society to a worldview which predated industry: "a change of mind, a new way of looking at the world and a new estimation of human purposes within."[96] Despite this criticism, however, Gay borrows a way of understanding history from the very worldview he seeks to criticize, articulating the technological society on its own terms: its momentum and inertia.[97] It never dawns on Gay that

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[93] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*, P. 5.
[94] Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), P. 127.
[95] Craig M. Gay, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), P. 98.
[96] Ibid., P. 99.
[97] Ibid., P. 59-92.

conceptualizing the technological worldview within its own deterministic language will result in the perception of a deterministic technological society. Nevertheless, his ultimate conclusion for Christians, therefore, is an all-or-nothing attempt to halt and reverse the momentum of the technological society before it is too late, simply by wielding a better worldview: i.e. Christianity.

The last of the pure Substantive theorists is John Dyer, who, in his work, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*, altogether avoids the reconciliation of the non-neutrality of technology with his highly biblical reframing of the subject into the sequence of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.[98] What is strange about Dyer is that while he acts as if humans can "redeem" technology, he understands technology as having a latent value-changing power that he does not completely address. He states, "…though a mobile phone is not itself morally evil, it cannot be considered 'neutral' either. Instead, *embedded in its design* is a tendency of usage *from which a set of values emerge*."[99] Based upon his prescriptions for the Christian who lives in the technological society, one might otherwise classify him as an instrumentalist.[100] However, his insistence that technology is accompanied by a set of values which are "embedded in its design" that can encroach upon the user's own values is a very substantiviststst portrayal of technology, not unlike Heidegger and Ellul. This leaves more questions for Dyer on the non-neutrality front of technology than answers.

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[98] John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), chapters 3, 5, 7, 9, respectively.
[99] Ibid., P. 178.
[100] Eric Eekhoff critiques Dyer's work as bearing the same issues as many other Christian books on the same topic. He rightly points out that in the way that "most recent Christian books about technology" are very "use-centered," Dyer wants to "change how they use" technology, as opposed to "what happens before you take it out of the box" ("From the Garden to the City: A Review" from *Mere Orthodoxy*, October 17, 2011, Web. November 15, 2015: http://mereorthodoxy.com/garden-city-review).

The final four adherents to Substantive Theory appear to be hybrids which include certain concessions to technological determinism and non-neutrality within specific conceptual contexts, but a hard instrumentalism within a Christian view of the world. Scholars who hold this view include James K.A. Smith, Jacob Shatzer, Brent Waters, and Douglas Estes. The first three may be categorized as "Liturgical Resistance," while the last is a form of "substantive alarmism."

Smith concedes that the power of the technological society is a subconscious adherence to a kind of technological "liturgy" that is progressively taking over the human's understanding of "space."[101] This all-consuming liturgy is a "covert incubator" of thought which makes us consider space as mere "nature" as opposed to God's creation, "a competitive arena for my plunder and self-fulfillment," and "a random assemblage for which we now claim 'progress.'"[102] This technological liturgy has infected all of society where technology exists, and according to Smith, the relationships which appear even through social media exhibit "just this sort of disordering liturgy."[103] He states, "Twitter and Facebook are not just 'media' that are neutral, benign conduits of information and communication; they are world-making and identity-constituting."[104] Appropriately, Smith's answer to this is escaping into the framework of an "alternative liturgy." He states, "In a society of…debilitating self-consciousness, it is a special grace to be invited into a story in which we are hidden with Christ in God…. Christian worship…is an alternative imaginary, a way that the Spirit of God invites us into the story of God…."[105] Essentially, Smith grants that the power of the technological society is manifested "on some unconscious level,"[106] however God's community serves as the external agent of the

[101] James K.A. Smith, "Alternative Liturgy: Social Media as Ritual," in *Christian Century* Vol. 130 Is. 5 (March 2013), P. 30.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., P. 31.
[104] Ibid., P. 33.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., P. 30.

technological society that can correct its negative influence through Christian liturgy. This view embraces Ellul's critique of the subconscious influence that the technological society has, but denies the substantiviststst position that it overtakes Christian liturgy, as well, thus restoring an element of Instrumental theory while one is at church and away from social media. Effectively, Smith sets up a dualistic structure of the world: those who think correctly and those who do not.

Similar to Smith, Shatzer and Waters begin with an all-consuming Substantive theory regarding the technological society, in that "technology disciples us" and manifests as a "liturgy of control."[107] However, both end with an effective escape plan by conceptualizing a liturgy of "judgment, confession, contrition, repentance, forgiveness, and amendment of life,"[108] where one can reinstate one's human-ness by way of a new language. Both ultimately conceptualize a tug-of-war match between the evil and subconscious powers outside the church, and the forces of good which can more fully conceptualize human-ness using an internal, seemingly secret knowledge.

Similar to Gay and Borgmann, Estes conceptualizes transhumanism as an all-consuming worldview that seeks to "redefine what it means to be human…[suggesting] that we are all that matters in our universe and that we must evolve to the next phase of human existence so that we can be truly self-reliant."[109] Much like Gay's conclusion, for Estes, this worldview is infecting all parts of human advancement which is increasingly becoming more difficult to undo by the day.[110] Effectively, much like those adherents of "liturgical resistance," Estes believes that

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[107] Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), P. 11, 12.
[108] Brent Waters, *Christian Moral Theology in the Emergin Technoculture: From Posthuman Back to Human* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), P. 179.
[109] Douglas Estes, *Braving the Future Christian Faith in a World of Limitless Tech* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2018), P. 47.
[110] Estes states, "In ages past, a casual reading of Scripture seemed enough to handle many situations. This is no longer the case. Instead the faster the world evolves, the harder it becomes to extrapolate biblical truths into daily situations" (Ibid., P. 132).

Christianity holds the key to reversing the effects of transhumanism simply by becoming more devout. He concludes, "Therefore, in a world of limitless tech, the more precise our interpretation of the Bible must become and the more diligently we need to study its pages and its history."[111] Estes seems to be engendering a type of technological alarmism, arguing that the only way Christians can combat the transhumanist drive of the technological society and reverse its negative effects is to simply become better Christians and evangelize more.

In conclusion, all of the Substantive and hybrid Christian thinkers envision an impenetrable force of technological reasoning that is totalizing in its effects. While the first group of thinkers posit a scenario of complete absorption into the technological society, the second group imagines a worldview that swallows up the entire universe under technological control, and only a pious or liturgically devout church has the ability to carve out for itself an island safe from its effects. None of which, however, confront the inherent temptations of viewing technology as non-neutral or human nature as pure object, nor do any address the implications those views have on ethical responsibility *within* the technological society.

Though it should be noted that hybrid theorists do envision some realm of freedom, even if it may be closing. Like the Critical theorists and Marcuse in particular, these theorists do presume some modest capabilities of the human to control technology through some ecclesial or liturgical response. However, all appear content with the presumption that humans are victims of technology, and none address the problem of ethical responsibility in relation to that presumption.

[111] Ibid., P. 132.

3. Technology as Ambiguous Instrument

Perhaps the most insightful of all recent Christian technological theorists comes from Catholic theologian, Mark S. Latkovic. Latkovic spends most of his essay giving a description of "ten models" of technological engagement, though ultimately argues for one approach over and against the other nine. Nine of the ten models that Latkovic provides are various expressions of Instrumental, Substantive, and Critical Theory, however, the one model for which Latkovic argues in favor at first appears unique; what he calls, "Technology as Ambiguous Instrument."[112]

Predominantly borrowing from a singular line in Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*,[113] Latkovic argues, "Technology is *ambiguous* and therefore we should be ambivalent about it. What is not in doubt is the fact that we will continue to be of two minds about technology and its role in our lives, even as we continue to rely on it more and more, whether we want to or not."[114] What is profound about this analysis is that Latkovic refuses to answer the question regarding technological neutrality, and instead posits what appears to be a phenomenological approach that expresses the difficulty in perceiving technology as either neutral or non-neutral. What is less profound, however, is that Latkovic seems to be using this language only to accept all nine other models regarding how Christians are to approach technology, ultimately leading Latkovic towards resignation regarding the role of Christianity within the technological society, and defers instead towards a mere use-based, instrumental-type posture.

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[112] Mark S. Latkovic, "Thinking About Technology from a Catholic Moral Perspective: A Critical Consideration of Ten Models," in *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* Vol. 14 No. 4 (2015), P. 699.
[113] In his encyclical, *Charity in Truth: Caritas in Veritate* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2009. P. 26), Pope Benedict XVI states, "Technology, viewed in itself, is ambivalent."
[114] Ibid., P. 699.

Nevertheless, Latkovic uses Benedict XVI's brief musings about technology to admit what appears to be rather true about the challenge of technological neutrality: it seems the human is unable to properly estimate the extent to which technology is shaping human life and the extent to which the human has control over it. While this is a rather small article that does not deeply explore the foundations or implications of such an observation, much less the specific challenges this thesis seeks to address, it should be noted that this indeed is a unique approach to the challenge of technological neutrality.

Therefore, while Latkovic's article does not clearly address the challenges of this thesis, and while the language of ambiguity is in no way unique to Latkovic and indeed shall be articulated henceforth more in the context of Niebuhr,[115] this language shall be adopted to better orient a synthesis of Niebuhr's anthropology, Mumford's Instrumental Theory, and Marcuse's Critical Theory. Indeed, as part of its unique contribution to scholarship, this thesis will create a new Niebuhrian type which shall be referred to simply as "*Technological Ambiguity*."

B. The Relevance of Niebuhr and this Thesis to Current Scholarship

The purpose of this section is to appropriately show how Niebuhr is to fit within current scholarship. First, (1) this section will show what Niebuhr offers the current Christian scholarship regarding the challenges of this thesis. Second, (2) this section will show what has already been accomplished in Niebuhrian scholarship relating to the technological society and how this thesis offers a unique contribution to his thought.

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[115] The word "ambiguity" is used frequently by Niebuhr, both in reference to the self and to history. For example, concerning the former, in IOAH (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952. P. 66-67), Niebuhr calls the human's dual relatedness as creature and creator places him in an "ambiguous position." Concerning the latter, in FAH (P. 16), Niebuhr states explicitly, "History is a realm of ambiguity." Regarding the relationship between the two, he states, "Man has an ambiguous position in this realm [the realm of history] because he is both the creature and the creator of its course." (P. 18)

1. How Niebuhr Fits Within Current Christian Scholarship

"Each century," Niebuhr proclaims, "originates a new complexity and each new generation faces a new vexation in it."[116] Niebuhr suggests that what humans face within every new era is a web of new considerations and challenges, and yet "…there is a perennially valid truth in the Gospel which *clarifies* a perennial *human predicament* and may redeem man from the constant tendency to aggravate his predicament by false efforts to escape from it."[117] Whether one is a slave or CEO, a laborer or a king, each new generation, empire, or reigning philosophical persuasion presents new vexations and challenges for the human to overcome. However, according to Niebuhr, it is the Christian view of reality—in all its complexities and paradoxes—that has the ability to *clarify* human nature, and with it the new challenges of technology, as the basis for achieving its own solution.

While current Christian scholarship concerning the technological society is ripe with arguments on how best to use tools or how the Christian church or Christian living is diminished or made increasingly impossible by technology, there has been little attempt to translate human beings into the technological society by way of a thoroughly Christian anthropology, or theology of sin. Unlike the more Instrumental Christian scholars, this thesis will propose that the technological society truly presents new problems, new vexations, within which the human must now live and understand. It is not as simple as scaling back the use of instruments to avoid the power of the technological society, any more than one can overcome an empire by simply protesting a vote. There is a dimension to the technological society that involves human beings beyond their capacity to escape, and it is Niebuhr's view of the Christian faith that offers serenity and guidance in the systems humans devise.

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[116] MMIS, P. 1.
[117] FAH, P. 34. Emphases added.

However, unlike the more Substantive Christian voices, Niebuhr grants this study ways of articulating the challenges of the technological society through the language of Original Sin, which implies both the *inevitable* evils which are endemic to all human endeavors, *and* the human's capacity to positively respond to its challenges. While there is a dimension to the technological society that seems all pervasive, Niebuhr's use of Christianity posits another dimension to human nature that is never fully consumed and can act as a critical agent of the technological society while still existing within it.

Ultimately, this thesis will use Niebuhr to offer a fuller approach to anthropology and sin within the technological society, a task for which de Vries effectively—though insufficiently—argues, but will do so from the approach of *ambiguity*, the position Latkovic begins to synthesize. However, through the Niebuhrian lens, *ambiguity* will be utilized in a way that is more than simply an opportunity to resign oneself to the idea that one cannot articulate how technology impacts or does not impact society, leaving one in the default position of technological neutrality. Rather, this thesis will utilize the paradox that makes technology appear ambiguous to say something about the inherent tensions of human nature, and with those tensions will form the basis for ethical responsibility in the technological society; what Niebuhr calls, "*the uneasy conscience*."

2. How This Thesis Fits Within Current Niebuhrian Scholarship

While it is evident that Niebuhr's legacy is still alive and well in the political realm,[118] Niebuhrian scholarship in the realm of technology and the technological society is significantly underrepresented.[119] There are only six contemporary scholars who have, to varying degrees,

[118] See *Appendix A*

[119] The most prolific scholars associated with Niebuhr today are all but silent on the issue of technology. In his essays, "Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century" (*Journal of Religious Ethics* Volum 37, Issue 4: December 2009) and "Reinhold Niebuhr in Contemporary Scholarship" (*Journal of Religious Ethics* Volume 31, Issue 3:

drawn Niebuhr into the current dialogue concerning technology. None of which, however, address this thesis' challenges of technological neutrality and ethical responsibility within the technological society, and only two argue from the basis of Niebuhr's anthropology. This section will explore all six recent works to show what has been accomplished regarding Niebuhr and technology, and what has not, in order to show the unique contribution this thesis will grant current Niebuhrian scholarship.

Among the least applicable for the purposes of this thesis are works published by Martin Halliwell, Jeremy Sabella, and Noreen Herzfeld. In his essay, "Niebuhr and the Limits of American Culture," Halliwell captures the essence of Niebuhr as he places him in dialogue with Critical Theorists such as Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Clement Greenberg. However, the essay is limited as he does not frame Niebuhr's anthropology as a centerpiece of the dialogue. Additionally, the technological society is very secondary to Halliwell, as he is more interested in Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of the 'Culture Industry'[120] and consumerism.[121] Similarly, Sabella writes a much-needed essay exclusively on Niebuhr and technology, but he deals primarily with Niebuhr's categories of irony, poetry, and prophecy, and does not deliver his argument from the basis of his anthropology as much as from the basis of Niebuhrian themes and literary devices.[122] In her article, "More than Information," Noreen

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Winter 2003), Robin Lovin gives no mention of future Niebuhrian studies in the realm of the technological society. In recent years there has been something of a Niebuhrian revival in scholarship, one that was so significant that Daniel F. Rice edited a major collection of the most recent work being published on Niebuhr (*Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited*). However, of the 19 essays compiled, only one (Halliwell) hinted towards Niebuhr's place within scholarship pertaining to the technological society, and as will be discussed, that was not even the main point of the essay.

[120] Adorno and Max Horkheimer define the "culture industry" as "…the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false." See: Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Edmund Jephcott (tr.), (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), P. 94-136; quote from P. 135.

[121] Martin Halliwell, "Niebuhr and the Limits of American Culture," in *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited: Engagements with an American Original*, Daniel Rice (ed.), (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009). P. 286-301.

[122] Jeremy Sabella, "Poets and Prophets in a Machine Age: Reinhold Niebuhr on Technology" in *Theory in Action* Vol. 1 (January 2012). P. 103-118.

Herzfeld attempts to utilize Niebuhr's conception of the Image of God to show the pride of those who advocate for transhumanism. Herzfeld makes interesting observations regarding how Niebuhr may have treated such a subject, not least her use of Niebuhr's concept of pride as a source for critiquing transhumanism, but she ultimately hardens Niebuhr's view of the Image of God into a law, as opposed to Niebuhr's more passive existential observation, and goes on to mount an attack on technology that appears to be more of a Christian-Luddite[123] approach of desperate abstention—perhaps more in-line with the Substantive theory of Ellul, if fully analyzed.[124]

The current scholar who is most prolific in drawing Niebuhr into contemporary technological scholarship is Braden Molhoek, who has written two articles and given one presentation on the subject. What distinguishes Molhoek is that he uses Niebuhr's anthropology as a point of contact between theology and science, a point he makes clear in his first foray into the subject, in which he concludes, "It is my contention that theology and science makes an ideal conversation partner for Niebuhr because…his anthropology is constructed in a way that is open to the insights of science."[125] Using the conclusion of this presentation as a foundation, Molhoek first turns to publish on the question of artificial intelligence and transhumanism. Arguing against Herzfeld's approach to Niebuhr and transhumanism, Molhoek uses Niebuhr to show that while the transhumanist's quest towards artificial intelligence has the potential for sin—as it is indicative of one's anxiety surrounding death—the various technologies in themselves are not

[123] While today "Luddite" as an adjective can be defined as one who strictly opposes technological progression, the Luddites historically were a band of people who formed "armies" in late 18th century Nottinghamshire, England who ultimately caused "…damage to machines and property that amounted to more than £100,000." See: Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future* (New York, NY: Perseus Publishing, 1995). Quote from P. 4.
[124] Noreen Herzfeld, "More than Information: A Christian Critique of a New Dualism" in *Theology and Science* Vol. 14 No. 1 (2016), P. 84-92.
[125] Braden Molhoek, "Revitalizing the Originals: Reinhold Niebuhr's Original Sin and Original Righteousness in Light of Theology and Science," presentation at *The Pacific Coast Theological Society* (6-7 November 2015).

inherently evil, and can indeed be used to better society in positive ways.[126] In his latest paper, however, Molhoek abandons Niebuhr's anthropological and existential method and instead uses Niebuhr primarily as a virtue ethicist, only utilizing his anthropology as an initial contact point between genetics and the biological foundation of Niebuhr's conception of self.[127] While Molhoek's work on the intersection of Niebuhr and technology is helpful in that he builds from Niebuhr's anthropology to conduct his analysis of technology, he, in his words, tends "toward the philosophy of science side" of Niebuhr's application and does not address the social dimensions of his work. [128] Additionally, he does not focus on Niebuhr's understanding of responsibility within the technological society, nor does he directly answer the question of technological neutrality.

Perhaps the two contemporary scholars who have contributed most to the direction of this thesis regarding the intersection of Niebuhr and the technological society is Charles McDaniel and Anna Robbins; the former for his delineations of the contours of technology from Niebuhr's perspective, and the latter for her diagnosis of the philosophical currents which largely govern contemporary culture. McDaniel's work is helpful in that it describes Niebuhr's perception of technology's effects as "indeterminate, depending largely on a society's moral framework and social relations."[129] This idea partially assists in the development of what thesis will describe as, "*technological ambiguity*." However, his development is, in his own words, "largely

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[126] Braden Molhoek, "Sensuality and Altering Anthropology in Artificial Intelligence and Transhumanism," in *Theology and Science* Vol. 14 No. 1 (2016), P. 99-104.
[127] In his article, "Raising the Virtuous Bar: The Underlying Issues of Genetic Moral Enhancement" (in *Theology and Science* Vol. 16 No. 3, 2018. P. 280), Molhoek expresses his reasoning for utilizing Niebuhr in the context of virtue ethics, stating, "Although traditional virtue ethics tends to draw upon the work of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, I blieve that Reinhold Niebuhr provides a succinct answer to this question. Niebuhr's answer is easier to place into conversation with modern science than these classical thinkers. Niebuhr assumes that the human condition is embedded in our biological and social nature."
[128] Braden Molhoek, "RE: Out on a Niebuhrian limb here," *Message to R. Clifton Bailey* (21 June 2019). Email.
[129] Charles McDaniel, "Development and 'Technics': A Niebuhrian Assessment of Technology's Contribution to Social Progress," at *Global Poverty Symposium* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 26 October 2008), P. 1.

unrefined,"[130] and never addresses the problem of ethical responsibility, nor does he begin from Niebuhr's anthropology to fully support such a position. Robbins' work is helpful in that, from a Niebuhrian anthropological methodology, she clearly argues and supports the view that contemporary culture operates primarily from the philosophical presupposition of a "naturalistic determinism…[which yields] a nihilism that is not conducive to human flourishing…."[131] However, her analysis does not directly address the technological society, though it should be noted that her critique of determinism does briefly touch on ethical responsibility.[132]

3. Original Contribution

In conclusion, there is a lack of scholarship—both Christian and Niebuhrian—regarding the three mutually reinforcing challenges this thesis seeks to address: the implications of the technological neutrality/non-neutrality binary, human nature within the technological society, and ethical responsibility within the technological society. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to apply Niebuhr's understanding of Christian anthropology and ethical responsibility to the techno-critical approaches of Mumford and Marcuse to forge a new approach that does not simply reduce technology to mere instruments, nor demonize it as an all-consuming form of impending disaster. Rather, this thesis will propose a Christian way of dealing with the technological society that is realistic about its negative effects without sacrificing the Christian's agency within it. In opposition to the dualism proposed by those who presume technology's neutrality over and against those who presume its non-neutrality, the Niebuhrian perspective that will be articulated in this thesis will formulate what shall be called, "*technological ambiguity*."

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[130] Charles McDaniel, "RE: Niebuhr and Technology," *Message to R. Clifton Bailey* (16 March 2018). Email.
[131] Anna Robbins, "It's always right now': framing the struggle for meaning in contemporary culture," in *Holiness* Vol. 2 Is. 3 (2016), P. 359.
[132] Robbins states, "…determinism undermines the potential and reality of moral responsibility." (Ibid., P. 365)

III: Scope, Contribution, Methodology, Outline

A. Scope

The scope of this thesis is limited theologically and in whom it can consider dialogically. Theologically, this thesis will be limited to the views of Reinhold Niebuhr and the various theologians he may reference, in the *way* Niebuhr references them. It is not possible to seek every distinctive interpretation of theologians he references unless it is relevant to the material. This same reasoning should be applied to his uses of biblical texts; what matters for the purposes of this thesis is how Niebuhr views the texts that he uses.

Additionally, this thesis is limited as to whom it can consider dialogically. There are a wide variety of views that permeate the scholarship concerning the technological society. This initial chapter set up types (Instrumental, Substantive, Critical Theory) to account for most scholarship on the issue, and has already eliminated both Hard Instrumental Theory and Substantive Theory. Furthermore, one primary voice has been distinguished to represent both remaining categories (Soft Instrumental Theory and Critical Theory) for the purposes of having a meaningful dialogue between these individuals and Reinhold Niebuhr. While it may be necessary at times to include others, these two scholars (Mumford and Marcuse) will serve as the primary interlocutors for Niebuhr due to their significance in constructing and accurately representing each respective school of thought.

B. Contribution: Synthesizing Towards a New Approach to Technological Engagement

On the one hand, while Mumford and Marcuse establish realistic perspectives on the technological society in that both can remain critical of technology without succumbing to determinism, both negate such positions by presuming too high or too low of an anthropology, further complicating their ethical prescriptions by their inability to establish ethical

responsibility. On the other hand, while Niebuhr does very little to construct a critique of the technological society in his own work, he frames human nature with enough dimension to maintain ethical responsibility so as to not succumb to apathy or resignation. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the three that results in a fresh approach to the technological society that is grounded in Niebuhr's anthropology and capable of maintaining ethical responsibility, while also remaining mindful of Mumford and Marcuse's technological critiques. This synthesis will culminate in a new type of technological engagement, which shall be called "*technological ambiguity*," which shall grant enough dimension to house the critical elements of Marcuse and Mumford, without sacrificing Niebuhr's anthropological center which is necessary to establish and maintain ethical responsibility.

C. Methodology: Theological, Prophetic, Ethical

The methodology of this thesis is composed of three parts: (1) theological, (2) prophetic, and (3) ethical. The theological method of this thesis will be anthropological in nature, and will be utilized to expose the responsible self at the center of human experience as illuminated by Niebuhr's Christian anthropology—what Niebuhr calls, the "uneasy conscience." The prophetic method of this thesis is to apply Niebuhr's view of self in order to expose the problematic anthropologies of two prominent philosophers of technology, Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse, on the basis of their inability to establish personal responsibility in their respective anthropologies, and to demonstrate how each respective philosopher's view of self and responsibility obscures their understanding of the technological society. Finally, the ethical method of this thesis is to synthesize key observations of Mumford and Marcuse with Niebuhr's view of sin and the uneasy conscience in order to contribute a fresh approach ethics in the technological society.

D. Outline

This thesis shall progress in an appropriate manner to methodology outlined above. First, the following two chapters will focus exclusively on Reinhold Niebuhr. Chapter 2 will establish his methodology—upon which the methodology of this thesis is based—and Chapter 3 will establish his concept of the easy and uneasy conscience through his use of Christian anthropology, which shall act as the philosophical structure through which the uneasy conscience is understood and maintained. Second, in keeping with the prophetic and apologetic methodology of this thesis, chapters 4-7 will serve as critical analyses of Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse's philosophies of technology, respectively, and will do so on the basis of each philosopher's anthropology in relation to Niebuhr's concept of the uneasy conscience. Chapter 8 will introduce a new type of ethical engagement with technology—*Technological Ambiguity*—and do so in concert with the observations of Mumford and Marcuse from the ground of Niebuhr's anthropology in order to contribute a novel approach to technology which maintains ethical responsibility without sacrificing a sober perspective on technology and its effects. The final chapter will conclude with a summary of the research, its various implications, and suggest a number of ways to move the research forward.

Chapter 2: Introduction to Reinhold Niebuhr and Methodology

Introduction

The ultimate goal for this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Marcuse in order to create a new category of technological engagement from Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. However, before such a goal is to be undertaken, it is imperative to unpack the methodology that is to be employed. While Niebuhr provides for this thesis the basic methodology to achieve its goal, it is admittedly a non-traditional methodology within theological and philosophical circles.[133] This means that it is all the more necessary to present a strong introduction and defense of Niebuhr's methodology from the outset in order to provide a critical and instructive lens for the chapters to follow.

Niebuhr is a complex intersection of three interdependent vocations: preacher, prophet, and theologian.[134] He is at once concerned with exhorting the people of God towards action (preacher), "waging war," in a prophetic sense,[135] against a destructive and confused civilization, and utilizing the resources of theology to better articulate both human action and world events from the position of a biblical understanding of self and human nature (theologian). Niebuhr sees this vocation as one that is a seamless and unified whole; he states, "Since I am not so much scholar as preacher, I must confess that the gradual unfolding of my theological ideas has come

[133] William Hordern claims that "Niebuhr lays a new basis for a rational defense of Christianity." (*A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1955. P. 154.

[134] Regarding preacher, in his "Intellectual Biography" (*Kegley and Bretall*, P. 3), Niebuhr likens himself to a "circuit rider" who is concerned with dramatizing scripture by placing "the gospel…in conflict with…customs and attitudes of our day." Regarding prophet, Abraham Heschel, famously compared Niebuhr to the "prophets of old" ("Reinhold Niebuhr: A Last Farewell," *Conservative Judaism* Vol. 25, 1971, P. 62-63). Regarding theologian, in his article, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Contribution to Christian Social Ethics" (in *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in our Time*, Landon, Harold R. (ed.), Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1962, P. 58), John C. Bennett argues, "Reinhold Niebuhr is catalogued as a theologian more than anything else and he has done more than any other American to change the climate of theology."

[135] Prophetic can be understood as a "relentless and incisive cultural criticism." See: Sabella, P. 112)

not so much through study as through the pressure of world events."[136] Niebuhr's theology is articulated in the context of his prophetic role in the world, and the outcome is the basis upon which his exhortation as a preacher becomes most pronounced.

This tripartite vocation of preacher, prophet, and theologian come together to produce a multilateral, mutually reinforcing method of analyzing the intersection of faith, human nature, and behavior. In her work, *Methods in the Madness*, Anna Robbins describes Niebuhr's overarching methodology most concisely: "…Niebuhr was consistently and fairly clear that his purpose was *apologetic*, his…outcome was *ethical*, and his focus was the *predicament of humanity* in history."[137] As preacher, the end result for Niebuhr is ethical, but as both prophet and theologian, Niebuhr would wage an apologetic war against the predominant philosophical, political, and cultural influences of his day on the basis of Christian anthropology in order to achieve such ethical ends.

This section will examine Niebuhr's tripartite methodology in the following order: (I) Niebuhr the theologian's anthropological method; (II) Niebuhr the prophet's apologetic method, and (III) Niebuhr the preacher's ethical method. Each part will respond to common criticisms levelled against Niebuhr, and end with a brief statement regarding the correlation between Niebuhr's method and that which is used in this thesis. This section will then conclude with a synthesis of the three parts, demonstrating Niebuhr's overall methodology, and a brief description of the overlap between Niebuhr's methodology and the methodology used in this thesis.

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[136] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Ten Years That Shook My World." *Christian Century* Vol. 56 (April 1939)): P. 546.
[137] Anna Robbins, *Methods in the Madness: Diversity in Twentieth-Century Christian Social Ethics* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), P. 93. Emphasis added.

I: Niebuhr the Theologian's Anthropological Method: Christian Realism

As anthropological theologian, perhaps the most unique feature of Niebuhr's methodology is best described as his "Christian Realism."[138] Both terms, "Christian" and "Realism," it should be noted, offer their own distinct nuance to exactly how Niebuhr executes his anthropological method. This subsection shall describe both parts of the term, "Christian Realism"—first "Realism" and then "Christian"—and will then show how his anthropological method works as a synthesis of the two.

"Realism," according to Robin Lovin, "emerges primarily in a negative assessment of 'idealism.'"[139] In other words, Realism is derived initially from a conception of what it is not. If Idealism is "loyalty to moral norms and ideals, rather than to self-interest,"[140] then Realism is "the disposition to take *all factors* in a social and political situation, which offer *resistance* to established norms, into account, *particularly* the factors of *self-interest*…."[141] Realism, to Niebuhr, does not ignore the complexities of reality or human nature at the insistence of the ideal, but rather gauges reality from the aggregate complexities of human life with a view *towards* the ideal.[142] Rather than beginning from the place where the human *is not,* or *ought to be*, Realism begins and ends from the place where the human *is*.

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[138] In his book, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995. P. 1), Robin Lovin makes it clear that Christian Realism "originated before Niebuhr took it up as his own." Other thinkers, such as D.C. Macintosh and Walter Marshall Horton, were also influential voices before Niebuhr. However, "Christian Realism" is a "term closely associated with Reinhold Niebuhr, when it is not exclusively identified with his thought." While others were a part of this movement before and during Niebuhr's lifetime, Niebuhr is clearly its chief theologian and shaper.

[139] Ibid., P. 2.

[140] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 119-120.

[141] Ibid. Emphasis added.

[142] In his essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Conception of Man" (in *The Personalist* Vol. 26, July 1945. P. 285), Walter G. Muelder argues, "…Niebuhr attacks and seemingly rejects…idealism. Yet, it is idealistic concepts and categories which carry the weight of his argument. Such ideas are: self-consciousness, transcendence, self-consciousness, self-transcendence, freedom, reason, will, universality, and personality." However, this critique is without merit, as Niebuhr dialectically places limits on each idealistic category Muelder mentions.

Niebuhr's Realism, when used as a foundation upon which his theology operates—the "Christian" part of Niebuhr's "Christian Realism"—creates what Robbins aptly describes as a "theology from below."[143] As opposed to such systematic theologians as Karl Barth and Stanley Hauerwas—those who "began with God and [then] developed an ethic;"[144] which is fittingly labeled, "a theology from above"—Niebuhr's "entire theological system appears to be rooted in ethical concerns, existentially discerned, and approached through reason as a 'theology from below.'"[145] Operating as a "Realism," Niebuhr's theology does not begin with an ideal, or even *the* Ideal (God), but rather from the complexities of the human condition as exposed in Christian scriptures. It is for this reason that Niebuhr-as-theologian should not be understood primarily as one who is on a quest to find God, but rather, Niebuhr utilizes theology as a resource that first and foremost clarifies the human situation.[146] To Niebuhr, Christianity is at its best when it is *revealing reality*—who humans are, what the world is, what the nature of power is, etc.—and only secondarily does Niebuhr find its ideals instructive, and only then are they to be taken alongside the sobering realities that the Christian scriptures express.

Niebuhr's realist approach—his "theology from below"—would have no problem finding adversaries within both the liberal and neo-orthodox theological circles of his day—interestingly, for similar reasons: his "defeatism," "pessimism," and his rejection of Christian idealism on the

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[143] In *Methods in the Madness* (P. 92), Anna Robbins describes Niebuhr's work on a spectrum first devised by James Gustafson ("Theology in the Service of Ethics" in Richard Harries, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, London & Oxford, UK: Mobray Press, 1986). Robbins argues that if Karl Barth's theology is characterized by its focus upon God (theology from above), Niebuhr's thought is characterized by its focus upon the doctrine of humanity and human sin.

[144] Robbins, *Methods in the Madness*, P. 92.

[145] Ibid.

[146] The term, "human situation," will be used until a more careful analysis of Niebuhr's distinctions regarding human nature, self, and sin can be detailed later in this chapter. What is meant by this term is essentially the aggregate of human existence, faculties (rational and physical), and engagements with the world.

basis of a more sober view of human nature.[147] Upon publishing his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, liberal pastor and academic, Charles Gilkey, after reading Niebuhr systematically tear down the optimistic tenets of the Social Gospel Movement—the movement upon which the hopes of early 20th century liberal Christianity rested—proclaimed to his family, "Reinnie's gone and done it…Reinnie's gone crazy."[148]

However, perhaps his most ardent adversary regarding his Christian realism for the majority of his life was a theologian many would often merge together with Niebuhr under the banner of neo-orthodoxy;[149] who his biographer, Richard Fox, calls Niebuhr's "old nemesis," [150] Karl Barth—and it is sufficient to say that the feelings were mutual.[151] Barth's most directed critique towards Niebuhr came rather implicitly, though through a thinly veiled lecture he gave at the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, just after WWII.[152] Barth exclaims:

> It is said that we should seek **first** after the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, so that all those things of which we have need in view of the disorder of the world may then be added unto us. Why would…we not take this sequence seriously? God's 'plan of salvation' is **above**, but the disorder of the world…is all **below**…. [T]he nature of this whole complex…only becomes visible and tractable from up there, only from the perspective of God's plan of salvation downward—whereas there is no prospect or path upwards to God's plan of salvation from the perspective of the disorder of the world….[153]

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[147] Dorrien, P. 450. Additionally, in his book, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. P. 95), Andrew S. Finstuen distinguishes Niebuhr apart from most protestant theologians, in that "for most people, his writings were either too difficult or too gloomy or both."

[148] Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), P. 3-4.

[149] Niebuhr's inclusion under the term "neo-orthodox" is largely dependent upon the definition. According to Niebuhr himself, however, he does not see the connection: "I have never thought of myself in their category…their indifference to and lack of understanding of political and social problems has always made them foreigners to me (Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, New York, NY: Pantheon Books, P. 214)." Also see: Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. P. 7).

[150] Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, P. 178.

[151] Fox recounts a time when Niebuhr visited Basel for a lecture, which happened to be where Barth lived. Anticipating Niebuhr's arrival, Barth was not sure whether "we would sniff at each other cautiously like two bull mastiffs, or rush barking at each other, or lie stretched out peacefully in the sun side by side." Barth recalled that they ended up having a "good conversation," but Niebuhr, however, "made no mention of the visit." (*Reinhold Niebuhr, P. 231)*

[152] In his book, *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017. P. 83), Jeremy Sabella described this meeting as being rife with tensions between the Niebuhrians and the Barthians, sparking "animated discussions," even prompting both scholars to respond in kind in their respective lectures.

[153] Karl Barth, "No Christian Marshal Plan" reprinted in *Christian Century* (8 December, 1948), P. 1330.

Here Barth is arguing that the task above all others is the "plan of salvation." The Christian response to evil in the world is the witness that evil has already been dealt with by Christ on the cross. Humans should not construct their witness from the "disorder of the world," but from the Kingdom of God, which is "above."

In response to Barth's address, Niebuhr's address at the same conference confronted the hypocrisy of Barth's more cozy and cloistered post-war theology, compared to Barth's more politically aware ethic through the span of WWII. He states, "Yesterday they [Barthians] discovered that the church may be an ark in which to survive a flood. Today they seem so enamored of this special function of the church that they have decided to turn the ark into a home on Mount Ararat and live in it perpetually."[154] In other words, during the war, Barth was keen on utilizing Christianity as a resource to realistically counter Nazi Germany, to use Barth's term, from "below." However, after the war, Barth seems content to stay out of such political engagement and focus exclusively on the Kingdom "above." Niebuhr concludes that Barth's approach appears to be able to "fight the devil if he shows both horns and both cloven feet. But it refuses to make discriminating judgments between good and evil if the devil shows only one horn or the half of a cloven foot."[155] The hypocrisy here that Niebuhr is addressing is that Barth's approach incorporates realism when it is overtly clear that evil is before it, but the perennial struggle humans face against sin and evil every day is not enough to merit a more nuanced and grounded approach to Christian anthropology and sin, over and against what

[154] Niebuhr, "We are Men and Not God," reprinted in *Christian Century* (27 October, 1948), P. 1139.
[155] Ibid.

Niebuhr called the "sanctified futilitarianism"[156] that Barth articulates from his idealistic theology from above.[157]

Ultimately, it is within the frailty and complexity of the human situation that Niebuhr utilizes the Christian scriptures to inform his depiction of the human condition, as well as the most realistic means of achieving political, social, and ethical progress therein. The idealism of Barthian neo-orthodoxy created, in Niebuhr's words, a "new kind of fundamentalism,"[158] while the idealism of the Social Gospel liberals created churches which were "irrelevant to the ultimate realities."[159] Christian Realism, therefore, is a demonstration that Christianity represents the best way forward that does not betray the complexities of life through blind devotion to its utmost ideals, but at the same time offers for the human the greatest resource for clarifying the human situation in which he or she stands.

II: Niebuhr the Prophet's Apologetic Method: Validation and Exposition

The way that Christian Realism operates as a method is largely distinguished in the journey from Christian revelation towards the *prophetic* use of Christian anthropology as apologetics;[160] the apologetic component of Niebuhr's process is a method known as "Negative Validation."[161] Donald Bloesch states that the task of Negative Validation "is to uncover the

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[156] Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, P. 123.
[157] It must be noted that the differentiation between Niebuhr's Realism and Barth's Idealism may falsely appear synonymous with a "cautious" v. "optimistic" dichotomy, respectively. While this may be the case between Niebuhr's realism and some, including Barth, often Idealism manifests as a rather *pessimistic* perspective on history and humanity, as one's quest for achieving what is decidedly beyond reality has a way of perceiving this world as further and further away from that Ideal. Chapter 5 will show this is precisely the case with Mumford, as his Idealism finds its ultimate expression in a bitter pessimism.
[158] Ibid., P. 117.
[159] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography" (Kegley & Bretall), P. 7.
[160] In his "Intellectual Biography" (Kegley & Bretall, P. 3), Niebuhr defines his apologetic as a "defence and justification of the Christian faith in a secular age…" and unabashedly admits that what he is doing is clearly apologetic, despite categorical concerns from other prominent theologians.
[161] Donald Bloesch, *Reinhold Niebuhr's Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) p. 52.

contradictions within the various alternatives to Christianity…[in order to] demonstrate its relevance…."[162] The contradictions Niebuhr finds among competing approaches to ethics and politics are wide and varied, but generally are those views within a school of thought—often those he called "modern"[163]—that betray the realistic and complex position of human beings. Effectively, the method is to approach opposing schools of thought and their views on the self and human nature dialectically, in that "concepts are clarified by stating what they exclude, and positions are explained by specifying what they reject."[164] Practically, Niebuhr carries this out by consistently beginning with a close examination of prominent schools of thought or highly influential individuals who deal with a particular topic, then he dialectically demonstrates the flaws of their conclusions on the basis of their anthropological articulations or presumptions.

At the bottom of this dialectical process between Niebuhr and his interlocutors is the negative validation of Christianity, which Niebuhr argues is "…involved in the paradox of claiming a higher stature of man and taking a more serious view of his evil than other anthropology."[165] Unlike other philosophies of human nature, Christian Realism argues that the Christian faith and Christian scriptures best illuminate the complexities at the center of the human condition, and in turn provides for the individual a clearer grasp on both oneself and one's environment.

However, it is vital to note that Niebuhr's Negative Validation is only the beginning of his prophetic stance against modern philosophy and culture. While his apologetic in itself is

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[162] Ibid.
[163] In NDHN, Niebuhr tends to limit the scope of modernity to four distinct approaches to human nature and history: Rationalism, Idealism, Naturalism, and Romanticism. However, a wider definition of modernity would appropriately fit Niebuhr's critique, as well. See N.J. Rengger's *Political Theory, Modernity, and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. P. 37-76 for a larger description of the different ways modernity could be defined or approached.
[164] Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, p. 3.
[165] NDHN, P. 18.

framed as an anthropological attack against the major doctrines of his time, a Christian view of self and human nature that is left standing at the end of his negative validation is inherently prophetic in what it reveals about self and society; it is a warning about the inevitable confusion and destruction of pride, sensuousness, and anxiety at the center of the human condition.[166] Niebuhr's approach to the prophetic "war against civilization" simultaneously acts, on the one hand, as a *validation* of a Christian view of humanity, but on the other hand, an *exposition* of humanity in order to turn humans towards God and mitigate the destructive inclinations of their nature. This latter part of his prophetic "war against civilization" can be traced, at least partly, to the influence of John Calvin.[167] In Book I of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin states:

> Indeed, our very poverty better discloses the infinitude of benefits reposing in God…. Thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity…and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone…*we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.*[168]

This statement by Calvin is an apt description of the expository facet of Niebuhr's prophetic mission. It is in this way that Niebuhr's prophetic methodology is more than simply *validating* a Christian view of anthropology over and against competing anthropologies, but includes within it an *exposition,* or revelation,[169] of human sin that serves as a warning unto humans, *about*

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[166] In his book, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992. P. 136), Ronald H. Stone argues, "As Niebuhr presents the Christian perspective on human nature, it is clear that he presents a particular form of that perspective. He is arguing for a prophetic view that focuses on evil in society and its overcoming…. Human nature cannot be adequately comprehended in its greatness and its squalor outside of the relationship to God."

[167] In his book, *The Doctrine of Humanity in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013. P. 22-23), Hamilton states, "A particularly pervasive motif in Niebuhr's writings is his use of an argument found in Calvin's interpretation of the relation between our knowledge of God and of ourselves…. The need for the contemporary world to aspire to God in earnest by beginning to be displeased with itself, individually and collectively, was an intense conviction of Niebuhr from nearly the beginning of his career."

[168] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill (ed.), Ford Lewis Battles (tr.), (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), P. 36-37.

[169] The term "revelation" in this context is to be understood, not necessarily as some truth from the great beyond, but as a truth about the world that has been exposed or brought to mind.

humans, and indeed an exposition of the very manner in which humans are destructive. The goal of anthropological exposition, for Niebuhr, is ultimately to place the human within a better understanding of both God and oneself.

Regarding Niebuhr's validation-as-prophetic-witness methodology, at the height of WWII, Niebuhr went so far as to argue that "…the task of redeeming Western society rests in a peculiar sense upon Christianity."[170] Indeed, it is very clear that Niebuhr's *magnum opus*, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, is a Christian attempt to clarify human nature from the position of the biblical view of sin in order to make sense of the problems which led up to WWII in an effort to better correct them.[171] Niebuhr states, "By way of validating the relevance of the Christian conception of man as a possible source of light for the confusion of modernity, we must consider the problems of modern culture…."[172] In other words, through his validation of a Christian view of human nature and sin, Niebuhr seeks to clarify the global confusions of his day. Historian and ethicist, Gary Dorrien paraphrases Niebuhr's in the following way: "Only Christianity had the resources to save Europe from fascist barbarism, but it had to be a Christianity that believed in the Christian doctrine of sin."[173] Niebuhr's use of a Christian view of self, human nature, and especially sin would become the central lens through which he articulated and prescribed appropriate action within both a personal and global venue.

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[170] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Does Civilization Need Religion?: A Study in the Social Resources and Limitations of Religion in Modern Life* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1927), P. 238-239.
[171] Friend and colleague, Paul Tillich, in his lecture on Niebuhr—since reprinted as "Sin and Grace in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr" (in *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice of Our Time*, Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1962. P. 30)—said of Niebuhr's work, "…I remember our walks along Riverside Drive in the two years in which Reinie worked on his *magnum opus* [*Nature and Destiny]*...and we talked about many of the problems which then came in such a wonderful way into this great book."
[172] NDHN, P. 25.
[173] Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, P. 466.

Perhaps Niebuhr's strongest challenger regarding his view of apologetics-as-prophetic-witness is the Barthian theologian, Stanley Hauerwas.[174] Hauerwas defines the "apologetic theologian" as one who feels burdened to "…translate our archaic, inherited forms into modern ones."[175] For Hauerwas, this desire to translate the Gospel to the world amounted to the theologian's capitulation to what Hauerwas called, "Constantinian Christianity": "an adapted and domesticated gospel [within which Christians] could fit American values into a loosely Christian framework, and [Christians] could thereby be culturally significant."[176] He reasons, "The more theologians seek to find the means to translate theological convictions into terms acceptable to the nonbeliever, the more they substantiate the view that theology has little of importance to say in the area of ethics."[177] In essence, Hauerwas argues that the more a theologian can resolve the issues of the world on the world's terms, the less one's theology is actually needed, and the more the theologian is woven into the fabric of worldly dramas.

For Hauerwas, Niebuhr was among the greatest offenders of this capitulation, arguing that "[Niebuhr] sought to naturalize theological claims in a manner that would make them acceptable to the scientific and political presuppositions of his day."[178] This to Hauerwas made Niebuhr's theology weak at the expense of a more politically-involved activism[179]—that

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[174] Hauerwas' Barthian influence is well-documented, not least by himself—in *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001) Hauerwas effectively argues against both William James and Reinhold Niebuhr, and instead gives a defense of the Barthian position of Natural Theology—but perhaps the most detailed work on the topic is David B. Hunsicker's *The Making of Stanley Hauerwas: Bridging Barth and Postliberalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).
[175] Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), P. 20.
[176] Ibid., P. 17.
[177] Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological," in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), P. 31-32.
[178] Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe,* P. 115.
[179] This is a rather common critique of Niebuhr, not least observed in Hauerwas. While reflecting on Niebuhr in his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, P. 6), Hauerwas states, "…theological convictions…have lost their power to train us in skills of truthfulness, partly because accounts of the Christian moral life have too long been accommodated to the needs of the nation-state…. As a result the ever present power of God's kingdom to form our imagination has been subordinated to the interest of furthering liberal ideas through the mechanism of the state." Additionally, in his essay, "the curious fact

effectively "[Niebuhr's] church *was* America"[180]—arguing that "Jerry Falwell[181] now sounds like Reinhold Niebuhr."[182]

Hauerwas' perspective, however, rests upon presuppositions that ultimately weaken both the relevance and effectiveness of his theology in the world. His most detrimental presupposition is uniquely Barthian: that there is no "point of contact" between the human's knowledge of God (Theology/Scripture) and the human's knowledge of the world (philosophy, anthropology, worldly religions, etc.).[183] Hauerwas quotes Barth as saying, "God is not 'man' said in a loud voice;"[184] meaning, one cannot simply begin in secular anthropology or philosophy and expect to arrive at any divine knowledge. This is precisely the presupposition Hauerwas is working from when he condemns Niebuhr's apologetic and anthropological method.

However, articulating more explicitly from the position of Calvin—and more implicitly from the position of Emil Brunner[185]—Niebuhr argues for the possibility of discovering God on

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that…the Lord always puts us on the just side" (in *Studia Theologica* Vol. 66, 2012. P. 42), Arne Rasmusson argues that Niebuhr's insistence upon "…making America the primary context and neglecting the church…results in Niebuhr's failure to display how theology could help him see the world differently and so influence his political analysis…." However, both Both Hauerwas and Rasmusson misunderstand Niebuhr by neglecting the universality of his perspective as one that is fundamental to all sinners and held together by way of the Christian scriptures. America was merely the *occasion* for his otherwise universal theology.

[180] Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), P. 478. Emphasis added.

[181] For non-American readers, this reference to Jerry Falwell is intended to be rhetorically harsh, given Falwell's reputation in the United States. Falwell was considered to be a "radical right" Christian whose ambition it was to utilize the "moral majority" to overtake the political sphere for the church in the United States. See: J. Philip Wogaman's *Christian Perspectives on Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. P. 103-122).

[182] Ibid., P. 32.

[183] The phrase "point of contact" is used often by Barth to refer to that place where the capacity to know the world intersects with the capacity to know God; essentially the overlap of "general" (natural) and "special" (scriptural) revelation. See: *Church Dogmatics* (vol 1.1, New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004. P. 236-237).

[184] Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, P. 25.

[185] In his essay, "Some Remarks on Reinhold Niebuhr's Work as a Christian Thinker," Emil Brunner criticizes Niebuhr for heavily borrowing from Brunner regarding his work on Natural Theology in Niebuhr's work *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, stating, "I was somewhat astonished to find no mention of the fact that in this work Reinhold Niebuhr had been strongly preoccupied with certain ideas which I had put forward…four years before…. This was all the more surprising to me inasmuch as Niebuhr had informed me personally by word of mouth in the year 1938, just as he was beginning to prepare those lectures…" (Kegley & Bretall, P. 32-33). Brunner states, "With us European scholars it is customary to give our readers some information as to the sources of our thought" (P. 32).

the basis of God's own image: human beings more clearly understanding themselves.[186] While there has been much written on the debate regarding the validity of Calvin and Brunner's position over and against Barth's,[187] it is important to note the impact Hauerwas' position—that one is unable to translate scripture into the world—has upon the effectiveness of his ethic. Essentially, while it is possible that "God is not 'man' said in a loud voice,"[188] as both Hauerwas and Barth affirm, the extent of Christian ethics cannot simply be a condemnation of the injustices of the world by speaking theologically "in a loud voice," either.

In his article, "Idolatry: the root of all evil," David Novak astutely characterizes the weakness of Hauerwas and Barth's approach to Christian theology by contrasting the work of Niebuhr with that of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Confessing Church[189] in the years leading up to WWII. While it should be noted that near the end of the war, both Barth and Bonhoeffer took a more realistic approach to their ethic,[190] the application born originally of its theological presuppositions, and that which lasted that majority of the war, Novak describes as an "…*opposition to the Third Reich [that] was theological*…and not ethical-political…."[191] In effect, the inability to translate a Christian ethic into the world—the presumption that there is no "point of contact" between the word of God and that of nature—resulted in one's inability to

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[186] This position is utilized all throughout Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man* (first broached in NDHN, P. 13), but should be credited, at least partially, as an offshoot of Calvin's "inward turn" in the first book of his *Institutes* and Brunner's "Nature and Grace" (in *Natural Theology*, John Baillie, ed., London, UK: Geoffrey Bless: Centenary Press, 1946. P. 20).

[187] To understand the various contours of the Barth/Brunner natural theology divide, see *Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply No! by Dr. Karl Barth* (Peter Fraenkel, tr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002). Additionally, for a defense of Calvin's view of Natural Theology in light of Barth's critique, see Stephen J. Grabill's *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006. P. 70-96).

[188] Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, P. 25.

[189] While Novak makes a compelling point regarding Barth and, to a lesser extent, Bonhoeffer, it is admittedly unfair to cast such a pointed aspersion on an entire church.

[190] See Charles Marsh's essay, "A Theologian for These Times?" (in *The American Prospect*, 20 February, 2002) for a description of Barth and Bonhoeffer's realism during WWII.

[191] David Novak, "Idolatry: the root of all evil," *ABC Religion & Ethics*, 23 August, 2011. Web: https://www.abc.net.au/religion/idolatry-the-root-of-all-evil/10101220 Emphasis added.

speak against Nazi Germany's evil without reducing it to a theological disagreement or incommensurability.[192] They chose not to reason with the German people how it was that what the Third Reich was doing, and of that which so many German people were a part, was "sinful," "idolatrous," or "injust," outside of the church's internal language and theological context.

Novak, who himself is Jewish, is especially grateful for Niebuhr's ability to grasp the magnitude of the problem earlier than most.[193] He argues that it is because Niebuhr was capable of recognizing and condemning the idolatry and pride present from very early on in the Third Reich, and was able to label it as such on biblical terms as translated into the world, that he could ready the cause for a nation to utilize practical necessities to oust the Nazi government, even if it meant going to war.[194] The piety of the Confessing Church, however, cloistered its prophetic voice behind a barricaded door, for no theological language pious enough could bridge them with the suffering world.[195]

There is perhaps no better example of ethical irrelevancy than the hypothetical political engagement given by Hauerwas himself in the closing words of the second chapter of his, and co-author, William Willimon's book, *Resident Aliens*. Hauerwas[196] describes a debate occurring

[192] It should be noted that Barth's move away from politics after WWII was not strictly ideological, and there remains some nuance to be acknowledge regarding how his post-war political theology—or non-political theology—developed. In his essay, "'The New World' of Karl Barth: Rethinking the Philosophical and Political Legacies of a Theologian" (*The European Legacy* Vol. 25 Is 2, 2020), Liisi Keedus argues Barth's new disregard for politics was a reaction to the new idolatries of the times. Keedus states, "Patriotism and Christianity seemed to have become inseperable," and this new unification of the two "shocked Barth." It is in this way it seems there were additional concerns for Barth that had a "theology from below" essence, as Barth was concerned with theology becoming too integrated with political thought.

[193] Novak cites one of Niebuhr's lectures from 1934 where he states, "It is significant that the amalgamation of nationalistic paganism and Christian faith attempted by the Nazi movement in the German Evangelical Church avails itself of the idea of God's creation of the natural differences of race and blood for the purpose of giving a religious sanctification to the cult of race."

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] It is assumed from the context of the chapter that Hauerwas wrote this story from his own experience, as opposed to Willimon, as Hauerwas is speaking about engaging with students. Hauerwas taught at Duke University, while Willimon is a pastor.

between students regarding a decision that the United States' president, Ronald Reagan, made regarding the bombing of certain "…military and civilian targets in Libya."[197] When the students saw Hauerwas standing nearby, they asked him about his opinion. He responded, "[A]s a Christian, I could never support bombing…as an ethical act."[198] One student took umbrage with this response, and pressed Hauerwas about his hypocrisy, stating, "You get so upset when a terrorist guns down a little girl in an airport, but when President Reagan tries to set things right, you get indignant when a few Libyans get hurt."[199] Hauerwas then hypothetically constructs what he considers a "Christian response:" He imagines, "…tomorrow morning, The United Methodist Church announces that it is sending a thousand missionaries to Libya." When the student told Hauerwas that Reagan would never allow missionaries into Libya, he responded, "I'll admit that we can't go to Libya, but not because of…Reagan. We can't go there because we no longer have a church that produces people who can do something this bold. But we once did."[200] Thus, effectively, Hauerwas has nothing prescriptive to say about Libya sponsoring terrorism outside of sending missionaries that he knows he cannot send.[201] It seems that, for Hauerwas, his Christianity can only speak from a position of transcended purity, and has no power to illuminate the truths of this world to improve it.

Niebuhr, however, *can* illuminate the truths of this world to improve it. For Niebuhr the prophet, by validating a Christian view of self and human nature through a dialectical approach

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[197] Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, P. 47.
[198] Ibid., P. 48.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] In his essay, "The Very American Stanley Hauerwas" (*First Things*, June, 2002. Web: https://www.firstthings.com/article/2002/06/the-very-american-stanley-hauerwas), and in light of Niebuhr's work, Stephen H. Webb convincingly argues that "Hauerwas is missing an ironic sensibility that understands how our best intentions often end up subverting the good we hope to achieve…." In other words, despite Hauerwas' clear conviction to maintain purity, Hauerwas is naïve to the fact that such fidelity to the Christian ideal can result in its opposite.

to modernity and contemporary culture, Niebuhr exposes an understanding of self that is—by its very nature—critical of human action in both a Christian *and* secular world. This process of validation and exposition of a Christian view of self and human nature establishes for Niebuhr a potent "point of contact"[202] regarding the universal sinful nature of human beings, through which he can both speak faithfully to scripture, yet realistically to the world in which he lives.

III: Niebuhr the Preacher's Ethical Method

The aggregate of Niebuhr's theological-anthropology and apologetic-prophetic methodology produces a very realistic and highly practical method of theological application on the basis of a Christian doctrine of sin. Niebuhr the preacher utilizes biblical language and themes to construct an idea of Christian conduct which is suitable to his time, all without neglecting the timeless and foundational guidance of the Christian scriptures. Once his prophetic voice is established—the validation and exposition of the modern human-as-sinner—Niebuhr would formulate a Christian way forward that does not betray the realities of sin, even as it strives to generate a better world at the direction of its ideals.

At the center of Niebuhr's ethical method is the fundamental conviction that the purpose of Christian ethics is to make the sinful individual and the sinful world *more closely resemble* the Christian ideal of *agape* love: "[A] love in which every life affirms the interest of the other;"[203] a love which demonstrates "an attitude of the ideal of spirit without any prudential or selfish consideration."[204] However, it is important to emphasize that a Christian ethic is realized and

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[202] Niebuhr uses the term "point of contact" when addressing Barth in NDHN (P. 158). He argues that Barth effectively breaks with his Augustinian roots when he negates the "point of contact." He states, "It is significant that Karl Barth, who stands…in the general Augustinian tradition but who is interested to prove that revelation from God to man has practically no points of contact with man except those which it itself creates, finds Augustine's definitions of the image of God in man very inconvenient and criticizes them severely."
[203] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, D.B. Robertson (ed.) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957), P. 50.
[204] Ibid., P. 220.

carried out by *sinners*, and for Niebuhr, myopically seeking the ideal of *agape* love without any regard for *who humans are fundamentally* is too often the source of the problem. "Original sin," Niebuhr proclaims, "is that thing about man which makes him capable of conceiving of his own perfection and incapable of achieving it."[205] For Niebuhr, the gulf at the center of the human situation that exists between an individual's ideals on the one hand and one's realistic capacities and limitations on the other, is where true ethical restraint and wisdom is most needed, for it is that place where humans so often confuse faithfulness for pride, and it is that place where humanity's vain pursuit to enact justice and morality in a sinful world inevitably become the catalyst for destruction or irrelevance under the veil of a naïve self-righteousness.[206]

While the ideal of *agape* love remains the ultimate *hope* for Niebuhr, he frames such an ideal as a necessary "impossibility" in the realm of human behavior.[207] Niebuhr proclaims, "[E]very individual is a Moses who perishes outside the promised land."[208] Human sin is an inevitability that is never completely eradicated from human behavior, rendering the complete manifestation of any ideal effectively impossible. However, this does not mean the Christian ideal of *agape* love has no place in Christian ethics. Niebuhr argues, "The obligation to support and enhance [society] can only arise and maintain itself upon the basis of a faith that it is the partial fruit of a deeper unity and the promise of a more perfect harmony than is revealed in any immediate situation.[209]" In other words, the ideal is to serve as an anchor of hope for sinful

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[205] IAH, P. 84.
[206] In his essay, "Niebuhr's World and Ours" (in *Reinhold Niebuhr Today*, Richard John Neuhaus, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989. P. 14), Fox describes Niebuhr's public theology as a "…vision of the secular world as a field of colliding, self-interested units [which] flowed out of his biblical understanding of human nature. The sinful self, whatever its pretensions to goodness and sociability, was always prone to put itself first. The will to power pushed through even the most humble convictions."
[207] In INCE (P. 62), Niebuhr argues, "Prophetic Christianity…demands the impossible; and by that very demand emphasizes the impotence and corruption of human nature…."
[208] NDHD, P. 308.
[209] INCE, P. 63.

Christians who live in a fallen world, but the intelligible realities of human limitation in the shadow of such an ideal should temper any illusion that humans alone can achieve it.

Thus, the goal for Niebuhr's ethical method is never to fully achieve the ideal of *agape* love on earth, but to more practically "enhance" society towards a "*more perfect* harmony" of human interaction by taking the Christian view of sin more seriously. In Niebuhr's words, it is "a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems."[210] Effectively, Niebuhr believes the purpose of a Christian ethic is to *improve* oneself and the world, not *perfect* oneself and the world; for it is in the human's quest towards ultimate purity and perfection—or even the mere illusion that either can be attained—that he or she becomes most prideful, self-righteous, and destructive.[211]

While one might be tempted to reduce Niebuhr's goal of Christian ethics to a formulaic and quantifiable utilitarianism, or perhaps more pointedly, to a latent pragmatism that is concealed by Christian language,[212] it is more accurately derived from a clearer scriptural exposition of the human situation as sinner, and the fruits of such an exposition which lead one to take more seriously scripture's warnings about the consequences self-righteousness and pride. Niebuhr states: "There is no deeper pathos in the spiritual life of man than the cruelty of righteous people. If any one idea dominates the teachings of Jesus, it is his opposition to the

[210] While this statement by Niebuhr is originally used in the context of speaking about democracy (CLCD, P. 118), it is a clear demonstration of Niebuhr's ultimate goal with ethics.
[211] In the conclusion to NDHD (P. 291), Niebuhr shows the importance of the Christian hope of the returning Messiah as an implicit refutation against the pride of utopianism. He states, "Against utopianism, the Christian faith insists that the final consummation of history lies beyond the conditions of the temporal process." Therefore, any attempt towards ultimate perfection is in itself the rejection of the coming Messiah, and effectively asserts the Messiah is already with humans, prompting the deleterious pride that has plagued humankind throughout history.
[212] In his book, *With the Grain of the Universe*, Stanley Hauerwas' central aim is to demonstrate how Niebuhr's theology is essentially a synthesis of Ernst Troeltsch's liberal Christianity and William James' pragmatism. While some of his more specific claims will be addressed later, it is important nonetheless to first clarify Niebuhr's position with this more general accusation in mind.

self-righteousness of the righteous."[213] For Niebuhr, the enemy of Christian ethics is not simply the lack of will or desire to achieve its ideals, but the illusion that one can fully and perhaps already has.

Niebuhr's aversion to self-righteousness and pride is perhaps the central theme running throughout his work, but it is important to understand how it intertwines with his more developed theological perspective on anthropology. While more will be discussed throughout this thesis regarding Niebuhr's conception of sin, self, and human nature, in order to comprehend his ethical methodology, it is important to first understand that Niebuhr's view of self is wrought with tensions and ironies. "There are no simple congruities in life or history,"[214] Niebuhr states. Human beings never experience a position of purity from which they may extrapolate their ethical conduct, and righteous behavior is never as simple to attain as humans might imagine.

Therefore, self-righteousness derives predominantly from an overestimation of who humans are and what they can realistically achieve or know. Niebuhr argues, "self-righteousness is the inevitable fruit of simple moral judgments…."[215] In other words, ignoring the very real limitations of human beings and their capacity for sin results in a an overly simplified formula of morality, inevitably leading towards an unjustified illusion of one's purity and transcendence. Such illusion may either lead to destruction—as one confuses oneself or one's community with the divine purposes of God—or irrelevancy—as one perceives of one's innocence as a pretext for inaction.[216]

Furthermore, Niebuhr observes that maintaining the Christian ideal without a sufficient grasp on the limitations of self and sin indeed acts as a barricade for Christians to achieve any

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[213] INCE, P. 138.
[214] IAH, P. 62.
[215] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Moral World of Foster Dulles," in *New Republic* Vol. 139 (1 December, 1958), P. 8.
[216] In IOAH (P. 37), Niebuhr describes the idealist's tendency "to preserve…innocence by neutrality."

measure of relevancy within culture or one's own life. Regarding cultural relevancy, Niebuhr advises that ministers "stop creating devotion to abstract ideals which every one [sic] accepts in theory and denies in practice," and instead they must "agonize about their validity and practicability in the social issues which [one faces] in our present civilization."[217] Much like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, who would devote their lives to the Law and traditions but "neglect justice and the love of God,"[218] those who preoccupy themselves only with the unattainable, abstract, and transcendent ideals of Christianity inevitably neglect the ways in which those ideals must press upon—if only partially—a sinful world; the self-righteous moralists become irrelevant, or in the words of Jesus, "like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it."[219]

Essentially, Niebuhr's ethical method was to first observe the limitations and capacities of human beings—as described in scripture—to devise a more realistic ethic which is more suitable to the fallen people of God. His priority to produce a Christian ethic that is "relevant" is not the result of a cold pragmatism, but emerged in a sincere reverence for God, a sober understanding of human capacity, and a genuine desire to more fully realize the power of *agape* love in the world.

However, the primary argument against Niebuhr's ethical methodology, deriving once again from the work of Stanley Hauerwas, is that Niebuhr sacrifices "*faithfulness*" for

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[217] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (Chicago, IL: Willett, Clark and Colby, 1929), P. X.

[218] Luke 11:41-44 (*NRSV*): "So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. Woe to You! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it."

[219] Ibid.

"*effectiveness*."[220] In fact, regarding this split between Niebuhr and Hauerwas, Roger Olson calls it "…*the single most important issue seemingly dividing them and their followers.*"[221] This point is so divisive that "Hauerwas himself declared Niebuhr *not a Christian*…."[222] However, it must be emphasized that this was not necessarily a hollow, personal judgment on Niebuhr from Hauerwas' perspective, but it was very clearly a result from the theological conclusions that sprang from his analysis of Niebuhr in his Gifford Lecture series, now titled, *With the Grain of the Universe.*[223]

In *With the Grain of the Universe*, Hauerwas' general argument is this: "if you scratch deep enough beneath Niebuhr's…practices of prayer and preaching, and his bold use of religious vocabulary, you find a Jamesian pragmatist."[224] Essentially, Hauerwas' argument is that Niebuhr's pragmatism—Niebuhr's emphasis on "effectiveness"—is due to what Hauerwas sees as the very core to Niebuhr's theology: a very "un-Christian" philosophy, first developed by William James. He suggests Niebuhr is not a Christian, but a Jamesian philosopher masquerading as a Christian theologian.

To be clear, while the connections between Niebuhr and William James are explicit enough,[225] and while Hauerwas' scholarship and research on the issue is unquestionable, his attempt to discredit Niebuhr on the grounds of just one of his many influences amounts to a

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[220] Roger E. Olson, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Stanley Hauerwas: Can Their Approaches to Christian Ethics be Bridged?" *The Currie-Strickland Distinguished Lectures in Christian Ethics*, republished in *Patheos* (28 February 2017): *https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2017/02/reinhold-niebuhr-stanley-hauerwas-can-approaches-christian-ethics-bridged/*
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Hauerwas' *With the Grain of the Universe* was originally the content of his series presented at the University of St. Andrews' august Gifford Lectures.
[224] David K. Weber, "Niebuhr's Legacy" in *The Review of Politics* Vol. 64 No. 2 (Spring 2002), P. 339.
[225] William James' influence on Niebuhr is apparent as early as his Bachelor of Divinity thesis, "The Validity and Certainty of Religious Knowledge." He also wrote the introduction to the 1961 reprint of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1961. P. 5), where he called the work a "milestone."

sophisticated use of Bulverism;[226] Hauerwas argues against Niebuhr by assuming that his Jamesian influence is both paramount to Niebuhr's work *and wrong*, and then proceeds to explain his error: Niebuhr is secretly Jamesian.[227] To accomplish this, however, Hauerwas very carefully has to minimize Niebuhr's other, more robust Christian influences—Augustine, Calvin, and Kierkegaard[228]—who were just as impactful on Niebuhr's approach to relevant/effective Christian ethics, and instead Hauerwas refashions Niebuhr's work as predominantly Jamesian to fit within the narrower lens of a "disguised humanism."[229]

In contrast to this argument, Gilkey passionately defends Niebuhr, arguing that Niebuhr's method of seeking Christian relevance is far from a "disguised humanism." He states:

> …Niebuhr's theology is…a "God-centered" theology and not a humanistic or naturalistic one…. Such an interpretation is clearly untrue to Niebuhr's texts; but even more, it completely falsifies what he wished to say in every line he wrote. Without God…there are only the possibilities of idolatry and destruction or despair and enervation; without God…there is hope of neither meaning nor renewal in life or in history. Without God…the secure establishment of the self and its community [is] our only moral ideal.[230]

Effectively, Niebuhr's theology is the exact opposite of a "disguised humanism;" it is very clearly so dependent upon God that without God, the core of its central message against sin, pride, and idolatry falls to pieces. Every facet of his theology is built upon the central

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[226] Bulverism is the attempt to argue against someone by first assuming they are wrong, and then proceeding to explain their error. It is a logical fallacy first recognized by C.S. Lewis, best explained in his article, "Bulverism" (*The Socratic Digest* Vol. 2, P. 16-20). What is found to be problematic about this kind of reasoning is it is a form of circular reasoning where the conclusion is validated by its premises.

[227] It should be noted that Hauerwas and his neo-Barthian followers are not alone in reducing Niebuhr to pragmatism. Cornel West, who identifies with pragmatism himself, calls Niebuhr "…the religious version of the Jamesian strenuous mood" and categorizes his method as a type of "Prophetic pragmatism…" (*The Cornel West Reader*, New York, NY: Basic *Civitas* Books, 1999. P. 150; 166).

[228] In *With the Grain of the Universe*, Hauerwas clearly attempts to break Niebuhr from his overtly Christian influences. He minimizes the impact of Augustine on Niebuhr's thought by stating (rightly) that Niebuhr came to Augustine later (but before writing his Gifford Lectures that would become *Nature and Destiny of Man* in 1939), but acknowledged that Niebuhr expressed "surprise" at the fact that he came to him so late, because "Augustine…answered many of his unanswered questions." It is important to note that finding affinity with Augustine, though mid-career, is no reason to minimize Augustine's influence upon Niebuhr's work, and it is furthermore no reason to suppose his work prior to that discovery is any less correlative to Augustine's thought. Additionally, he makes mention of Kierkegaard's influence on Niebuhr only twice: once in a brief footnote regarding Niebuhr's use of Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety (P. 119) and once in the context of Niebuhr's development of sin: that "sin presupposes itself" (P. 120), and never once links Calvin to Niebuhr.

[229] Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, P. 64.

[230] Gilkey, P. 188.

presupposition of God's existence, and without it, there is no check upon the pride of humankind.[231]

Furthermore, from his own work, Niebuhr explicitly asserts the interaction of humans with the true God—and this God is not some placeholder of gaps in an elaborate philosophy, or the hypothetical character in a Christianized humanist mythology. Consider the following statement from Niebuhr regarding God choosing Israel:

> …God choosing Israel…is, in a genuine sense, the beginning of revelation; for here a nation *apprehends, and is apprehended by the true God and not by a divine creature of its own contrivance.* The proof of the genuineness of His majesty and of the truth of His deity is attested by the fact that He confronts the nation and the individual as the limit, and not the extension, of its power and purpose.[232]

For Niebuhr, God *genuinely exists*. God is not a character created by the Israelites; God is one who *genuinely* interacts with the people of God to reveal to them, among many things, the limits of their power. It is upon this truth and in accordance with God's revelation that Niebuhr establishes the concepts of humility, sin, idolatry, and pride.

However, it should be admitted that despite Hauerwas' attempt to unfairly eschew the complexity of Niebuhr's influences and work, in so doing, Hauerwas does indeed reveal what appears to be a flaw in Niebuhr's work that is rather difficult to ignore. In his essay, "Niebuhr's Legacy," David Weber starkly boils Hauerwas' fundamental problem with Niebuhr down to this: "Niebuhr's theology lacked dogmatic commitments, and so had no moral authority."[233] This critique, while it cannot be attributed solely to James' influence on Niebuhr, as Hauerwas would suggest,[234] proves problematic for Niebuhr, not because it is entirely true, but because it is true

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[231] In his essay, "The Story of an Encounter" (in *Reinhold Niebuhr Today*, Richard John Neuhaus, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989. P. 105), Paul T. Stallworth recounts his conversation with theologian Paul Ramsey. Ramsey states, "It's impossible to recognize Niebuhr in what Hauerwas has written."

[232] FAH, P. 104.

[233] Weber, "Niebuhr's Legacy," P. 347.

[234] It is very clear that the influence of Augustine is just as responsible for Niebuhr's hesitance to apply absolute dogmatics in the realm of Christian ethics. Augustine's influence, as according to Gilkey (*On Niebuhr*, P. 128) tells Niebuhr, "…sin is not always (in fact almost never) a conscious and deliberate choice of known evil; on the

enough to require some level of explanation. It is no secret that Niebuhr actively opposes such absolutes as moral dogmatism;[235] he states, "The worst form of intolerance is religious intolerance, in which the particular interests of the contestants hide behind religious absolutes."[236] For Niebuhr, absolute dogmatic commitments were a large part of the problem, so this allegation, at least initially, appears merited.

In response to this claim, David Novak convincingly rejects the argument fully. He argues, "Niebuhr remained sufficiently tethered to a Christian (and Jewish) understanding of absolutes—especially…the absolute prohibition against idolatry."[237] While this singular commitment may not be enough for Hauerwas and Weber to retract their critique outright, the *absolute* prohibition against idolatry is a "foundation of what could be considered his ethics."[238] While Novak remains hesitant to fully distinguish idolatry as the foundational dogmatic commitment to Niebuhr's ethics, his hesitance is perhaps due only to another, more pronounced dogmatic commitment: Niebuhr's prohibition against sin itself.[239] But as Novak shows, there is an interconnected relationship between idolatry and sin in Niebuhr's work that stands as an absolute commitment throughout his life.

It is in this way that Niebuhr's emphasis on *effectiveness* and relevance is bound up in his resolute commitment to *faithfulness*. Faithfulness—as manifest in his stance against idolatry as an absolute commitment—is precisely what tempers Niebuhr's ethic to refrain from the illusion

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contrary, it is done believing it is the good." Reducing the concept of sin merely to an unquestionable duty to dogma conceals the very home where sin so often resides.

[235] In his essay, "Barth—Apostle of the Absolute" (in *Christian Century*, 13 December 1928, P. 1523-1524), Niebuhr wrote that Barthianism produced "a new and more terrifying subjectivism" that is dangerously "asserted" by "dogmatism." In other words, dogmatic absolutes tend to both mask and justify the subjective whims of the adherent.

[236] NDHN, P. 200-201.

[237] David Novak, "Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas," *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 40 No. 2 (2012), P. 286.

[238] Ibid., P. 287.

[239] In NDHN (P. 93) Niebuhr himself calls the doctrine of original sin a "dogma."

that one can achieve the Christian ideal of *agape* love, and it is what presses Niebuhr to fashion his ethical concerns more concretely within the realistic constraints of human life.

Conclusion

Niebuhr's tripartite methodology can be described concisely as the validation and exposition of a Christian view of self and anthropology, over and against the anthropologies of modernity, with a view towards establishing a relevant Christian ethic in today's world. Likewise, the methodology of this thesis will mirror that of Niebuhr's, but go further by developing his concept of the "uneasy conscience" as a way of validating and exposing personal responsibility within a technological society. This fuller development will operate as the basis upon which a Christian view of self is validated over and against Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse, and become the lens through which relevant and effective human conduct can flourish in the technical age.

Chapter 3: Reinhold Niebuhr's Anthropology and the Easy/Uneasy Conscience

Introduction

The ultimate goal for this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Marcuse in order to create a new category of technological engagement from the basis of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. This chapter will serve as the anthropological base from which this thesis shall critique Mumford and Marcuse, but also construct a new type of ethical engagement with technology. While the following four chapters (Chapters 4-7) will highlight Mumford and Marcuse's perspectives on the self as it exists within the technological society—and do so with a Niebuhrian critical/prophetic response to those perspectives—this chapter will focus exclusively on constructing the basis for that response.

As the theological foundation of this thesis, this chapter will do two things. First (I), this chapter will examine Niebuhr's central premises regarding human nature and the self from this basis of his theological and philosophical claims. Second (II), this chapter will demonstrate Niebuhr's theological basis for ethical responsibility as expressed in his concepts of the *easy* and *uneasy conscience*, and show the pitfalls inherent to other anthropologies which results in an *easy conscience*.

I: Christian Anthropology: Human Nature, Spirit, and the Self

The bulk of the analysis regarding Niebuhr's Christian anthropology in the present section are derived from Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*, particularly *Volume I* which is

subtitled, "Human Nature." With both volumes taken together, it is without doubt Niebuhr's most comprehensive work[240] and has been heralded as "…a masterpiece of contemporary exposition of fundamental Christian themes."[241] Yet, despite its rather sweeping reach, it is still decidedly *not* a *Summa*, like Aquinas, Barth, or Paul Tillich set out to construct.[242] This is not a work regarding *all* the doctrines of scripture, but rather just one, but one fully: his doctrine of anthropology, radiating outward to touch every part of theology. William John Wolf effectively describes the centrality of Niebuhr's anthropology in *Nature and Destiny* in the following way: "[Niebuhr] makes one doctrine, brilliantly plumbed to its depths, the basis of his whole thought."[243] It is in this work that Niebuhr's method of Christian Realism is most fully on display, composed truly as a "theology from below."[244]

However, while *Nature and Destiny* is most aptly described as a book which deals with a Christian doctrine of anthropology, as Wolf observes,[245] *only* describing it as such diminishes the full purpose and weight of what Niebuhr intended to accomplish. While, traditionally, scholarship has rightly reflected at least part of Niebuhr's central goal, by both identifying the work and utilizing it as a resource in terms of a Christian anthropology, another, perhaps more nuanced goal is in some ways more central. Niebuhr himself describes his purposes with *Nature and Destiny* in the following way: "to analyze the meaning of the Christian idea of sin more fully *and to explain the uneasy conscience expressed in the Christian religion***.**"[246] Niebuhr's *magnum opus* was not written merely to give an account of Christian anthropology and sin, but also to

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[240] In his dictionary entry titled, "Niebuhr, Reinhold" (entry in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair D. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds., Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1988, P. 469), J.W. Gladwin calls *The Nature and Destiny of Man* Niebuhr's "fullest theological statement."
[241] Ibid., P. 470.
[242] William John Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man" (Kegley & Bretall), P. 230.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Robbins, *Methods in the Madness*, P. 92.
[245] Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man," P. 230.
[246] NDHN, P. 18. Emphasis added.

highlight a specific feature of a Christian view of self that he calls, "the uneasy conscience"—that which he describes as "the protest of man's essential nature against his present state."[247] It is this concept of the uneasy conscience which serves as the basis for his understanding of personal responsibility: the ability to "not only understand the reality of the evil in himself but escape the error of attributing…evil to any one [sic] but himself."[248]

It should be noted that while his view of the uneasy conscience is central to this thesis, a deeper analysis of Niebuhr's construction of a Christian view of self is necessary to fully understand the basis, implications, and import of such a concept. Therefore, working alongside *Nature and Destiny*, the purpose of this section is to more fully detail Niebuhr's Christian anthropology and the foundation from which his concept of the uneasy conscience emerges. Along with this analysis, a more fully developed picture of the easy and uneasy conscience shall emerge.

This section is foundational to this thesis because it acts at the "point of contact" between Niebuhr's Christian anthropology and that of Mumford and Marcuse. For this purpose, this section will be structured in a way that can be cross-examined during the prophetic and dialectical phase of this thesis, while simultaneously remaining in fidelity with the progression of Niebuhr's thought.[249] All three thinkers will be examined along the following three categories of anthropology: (A) the human's relationship to nature, (B) how the human understands and relates to nature, and (C) how each conceptualize human consciousness. As for this section regarding Niebuhr's thought specifically, these three categories will be correlatively named in the following way: (A) Human Nature: the human as a problem unto itself, (B) The Human Spirit:

[247] Ibid., P. 267.
[248] Ibid., P. 17.
[249] Chapters 3 and 5, respectively.

reason, freedom, and self-transcendence, and (C) Consciousness: understanding oneself and the world from a governing center.

A. Human Nature: Human Beings as a Problem Unto Themselves

From the outset, it is vital to note for the purposes of this thesis that what Niebuhr puts forth regarding human nature is, in his mind, so "obvious"[250] it is indeed indisputable, and those characteristics for which he describes about human nature are so foundational, they are timeless and immutable.[251] While the act of simply calling a description about human nature "obvious" may not inspire much confidence epistemologically,[252] it must be presumed that what Niebuhr means by this is that his observations about human nature are so basic and irreducible that they would be foolish to question; and, indeed, if one were to question his foundational observations, one may even, by the very act of questioning, affirm his preliminary observations.[253]

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[250] NDHN, P. 3.

[251] While sometimes described as "absolute," "permeance," or "the primordial structure" of human nature, the term "immutable," preferred by Tex Sample in his work, *Human Nature, Interest, and Power: A Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Thought* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. P. 4) is best at describing Niebuhr's stance regarding those which he opposes: views of human nature which are malleable, fungible, and dynamic. But Niebuhr's position on human nature is one that is unchangeable in what is revealed existentially about the self. "There is no escape," Sample states, "by the self from his existential condition…. Niebuhr is adamant that human nature itself is immutable; only its particular historic expressions can be changed." However, it must be noted that elements of the human's nature can change, all the while one's existential problem does not. See: Molhoek, "Sensuality and Altering Anthropology in Artificial Intelligence and Transhumanism," P. 100.

[252] Due in part to his pragmatism on the one hand, and his Christian conviction that the human is fallen even in one's perception of the cosmos (which is indeed part of his critique of modernity), Niebuhr has long experienced a fraught relationship with those who champion epistemological clarity. In the opening of his essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge" (Kegley & Bretall, P. 36), Paul Tillich states, "The difficulty writing about Niebuhr's epistemology lies in the fact that there is no such epistemology. Niebuhr does not ask, 'How can I know?'; he starts knowing. And he does not ask afterward, 'How could I know?', but leaves the convincing power of his thought without epistemological support." Similarly, Henry Nelson Weiman (Ibid., P. 336) states, "The word 'reason' has many different meanings. Niebuhr constantly refers to it, but to my knowledge never explains what he means by it." In her book, *Courage to Change* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961. P. 233), June Bingham once recounted as story where Niebuhr was put on the spot by a student regarding the question of his epistemology: "A student once asked in class for Niebuhr's definition of reason. 'Analytic and logical faculty,' was the snap answer, and Niebuhr promptly recognized another questioner."

[253] Niebuhr's opening to the problem of human nature is his attempt to resolve the ironies that he discovers in the question, "How shall he think of himself?" Through his inability to do so clearly, however, suggests a problem at the center of humankind: "Every affirmation which he may make about his stature, virtue, or place in the cosmos becomes involved in contradictions when fully analysed" (*NDHN*, P. 1). Essentially, it is possible that by questioning this basic of a question is to more firmly establish the problem.

Niebuhr argues that human beings—most fundamentally—are a problem unto themselves. On the very first page of *Nature and Destiny*, Niebuhr states,

> Man has always been his own most vexing problem. How shall he think of himself? Every affirmation which he may make about his structure, virtue, or place in the cosmos becomes involved in contradictions when fully analysed. The analysis reveals some presupposition or implication which seems to deny what the proposition intended to affirm.[254]

What stands at the center of human nature is not a clearly demonstrated pronouncement, but a rather stubborn and unanswerable question. The question at the center of human nature is so confounding, that the more one aspires towards its answer, the more one complicates one's means of comprehending it.

Niebuhr proceeds by establishing two "obvious facts" through his unsuccessful attempt to answer the question of who humans are. First, "If man insists that he is a child of nature and that he ought not to pretend to be more than the animal, which he obviously is, he tacitly admits that he is…a curious kind of animal who has both the inclination and capacity to make such pretensions."[255] Thus, on the one hand, if the human is an animal, the human is at least a peculiar animal who can label him or herself as an animal. Humans not only has the ability of self-awareness, but also has the ability to utilize language and reason to distinguish oneself from animals, categorize, and create symbols to understand the world around them.

Second, however, if the human chooses to understand him or herself as that which decidedly transcends the animal, "…there is usually an anxious note in his avowals of uniqueness which betrays his unconscious sense of kinship with the brutes."[256] In other words, while the question in itself suggests a uniqueness about human beings, one's obvious affinity with the animals can never be fully abandoned without neglecting that which appear to be

[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.

fundamental qualities intrinsic to human life. The human must eat, drink, and use shelter; the human must procreate and survive; the human must die. These are indispensable qualities the human shares with the animals that cannot be denied in one's claim of human uniqueness.

For Niebuhr, the implicit structure of humanity which preconditions the question of who humans are can be reduced to two general facts—one obvious, one less obvious—about human nature. Niebuhr states, "The obvious fact is that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form…."[257] The less obvious fact is that to some degree, "…man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."[258] To this point, Niebuhr appears—at least to some degree—to both partially affirm and deny the validity of both as expressed within the original unanswerable question.

While the following subsection will describe more clearly Niebuhr's "less obvious fact" regarding the human-as-spirit, it must be emphasized that Niebuhr observes from nature—though later validated and clarified by scripture—that the self appears to be unified.[259] While humans have the capacity to stand outside of one's environment—to observe the position of the object from a position of subjectivity—the two for Niebuhr are entirely bound up into the same nature. In other words, the human's capacity for self-transcendence is a feature of its nature. One example Niebuhr gives regarding this unity is the necessary subordination of mind (spirit) to natural impulses. He states:

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[257] Ibid., P. 3.
[258] Ibid.
[259] It is significant in this regard that Niebuhr insists upon the unity of self, given the widely accepted and influential Freudian construction of id, ego, and super-ego of his day. In his book, *Psychology, Religion, and the Nature of the Soul: A Historical Entanglement* (Kent, UK: Springer Books, 2011. P. 54), Graham Richards clarifies Niebuhr's distinction with the Freudian divisions, stating, "[Niebuhr] is insistent on the comprehensive nature of the self, rejecting Psychological images of the self being influenced, challenged or affected by entities such as the id, super-ego, passions etc. as if these were *not* all, ultimately, aspects of the self."

> Man is never a simple two-layer affair who can be understood from the standpoint of the bottom layer, should efforts to understand him from the standpoint of the top layer fail…The freedom of man consists not only…of the windows of mind which look out from his second story; but also of vents on every level which allow every natural impulse a freedom which animals do not know.[260]

In other words, the human's animalistic drives towards survival, procreation, and power are never simply animalistic, as they find their ultimate expression in the freedom of one's rational and transcendent faculties. The human must eat, but he or she pursues that goal strategically. The human must survive, but that drive is partially expressed in the use of its more unique faculties of rationality and communal coordination. Humans must clothe and shelter themselves, but that need is met skillfully and creatively with a certain freedom over their environment. Niebuhr's conflicting "facts" about human nature are not entirely distinct from one another and most often do not conflict, but are rather compounded in an internal unity which humans cannot fully grasp without an all transcendent "…vantage point…from which to understand the predicament of [human beings]."[261]

Niebuhr argues that the human's inability to fully stand outside of the self renders the task to answer the question, "who am I?" in any satisfying way impossible. Thus, while Niebuhr does believe there to be unity within the composition of self—a unity of both nature and spirit—full compliance with or knowledge of that fact, Niebuhr argues, is only offered through the Christian perspective of anthropology—one of unity between the "lower" (animal) features and "higher" (spiritual) features—known as the *Imago Dei*.[262] Furthermore, without the unifying principle of *Imago Dei,* Niebuhr argues that the tendency among human beings is to assume easy

[260] NDHN, P. 40.
[261] FAH, P. 9.
[262] Niebuhr describes the *Imago Dei* (Image of God) in the following way: "In its purest form the Christian view of man regards man as a unity of God-likeness and creatureliness in which he remains a creature even in the highest spiritual dimensions of his existence and may reveal elements of the image of God even in the lowliest aspects of his natural life." (NDHN, P. 150)

solutions to the problem by subordinating one essential component to the other, if not fully demonizing one essential component in an effort to unify all of life with the other.[263]

In conclusion, given the human tendency to assuage the complexities of human nature through "premature solutions,"[264] it is vital to refrain Niebuhr's insistence that the "obvious facts" of his observation regarding the central problem of human nature are immutable. Niebuhr resolutely states: "*No philosophy or religion can change the structure of human existence. That structure involves individuality in terms of both the natural fact of a particular body and the spiritual fact of self-transcendence."*[265] Niebuhr's emphasis here on the immutable essence of the problem which stands at the center of human nature will be the basis upon which his conception of the uneasy conscience will emerge. Likewise, the *negation* of this problem, and its "premature solution," will be the basis upon which his conception of the easy conscience will emerge. Before his analysis of these two concepts are examined, however, a closer study of his understanding of the human-as-spirit is necessary.

B. Human Spirit: Reason, Freedom, and Self-Transcendence

While the human is certainly what Niebuhr calls, "a child of nature," the human being also expresses itself as "spirit"—one who "…stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."[266] The concept of "spirit" for Niebuhr expresses itself in three dominant ways—Reason, Freedom, and Self-Transcendence—but importantly, always remains tethered to the human as "a child of nature." For Niebuhr, this construction of self culminates to create his

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[263] Niebuhr states, How difficult it is to do justice to both the uniqueness of man and his affinities with the world of nature below him is proved by the almost unvarying tendency of those philosophies, which describe and emphasize the rational faculties of man or his capacity for self-transcendence to forget his relation to nature and to identify him, prematurely and unqualifiedly, with the divine and the eternal; and of naturalistic philosophies to obscure the uniqueness of man." (Ibid., P. 4)
[264] Ibid., P. 4.
[265] Ibid., P. 69. Emphasis added.
[266] NDHN, P.3.

understanding of the *Imago Dei*, but, as he argues, it is also the source from which one engenders the potentiality for misunderstanding the self and committing sin.

Niebuhr observes that, classically,[267] reason had held the distinction of being the human's unique faculty through which he or she understands and relates to the world. While Niebuhr affirms the usefulness of reason,[268] he argues that reason is obscured both in its roots and in its branches. In its roots, Niebuhr argues that reason is ambiguous in that the human's "…impulses are more deeply rooted than his rational life…"[269] and that reason is so often subjugated to the will, "…as kings use courtiers and chaplains…."[270] Reason can be used for any given purpose to justify any given action. It is in this way, Niebuhr argues, that the classical understanding of reason is often misunderstood in its relation to the human's lower, more animalistic, faculties.

On the other hand, at its branches, Niebuhr utilizes Augustine's later writings on the mind to argue that reason is obscured in the heights of self-transcendence.[271] Reflecting simply on the concept of memory, Augustine first plunges deep into his mind to demonstrate its capacity for self-transcendence. He states:

> …even while I dwell in darkness and silence, in my memory I can produce colours if I will…yea I discern the breath of lilies from violets, though smelling nothing… These things I do in the vast courts of my memory…. There also I meet with myself, and recall myself and when and where and what I have done and

[267] Niebuhr gives the examples of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics as "classical" examples of misunderstanding human uniqueness as reason. (NDHN, P. 4-11)

[268] In MMIS (P. 26), Niebuhr argues, "Reason enables [the human], within limits, to direct his energy so that it will flow in harmony, and not in conflict, with other life…. Reason may extend and stabilise [sic]…the capacity to affirm other life than his own." In his NDHN (P. 263), regarding logic as a structured approach to reason, Niebuhr allows that "The laws of logic are reason's guard against chaos in the realm of truth. They eliminate contradictory assertions."

[269] MMIS, P. 26. This view from Niebuhr regarding reason is highly present in his early work and demonstrates a certain level of dependence upon the work of David Hume. In his work, *A Treatise on Human Nature Vol. II* (London, UK: J.M. Dent & Sons Publishing, 1966. P. 127), Hume states, "Reason is…the slave to the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."

[270] Ibid., P. 44.

[271] In NDHN (P. 157), Niebuhr makes a distinction between Augustine's earlier, more Platonic work, and his later, more explicitly Christian work regarding the *Imago Dei* as consciousness. He states, "As a neo-Platonist Augustine sought God in the mystery of self-consciousness; and there are passages in his earlier writings in which he is still close to the deification of self-consciousness." However, "When some of Augustine's earlier lapses into neo-Platonism are discounted, it must be recognized that no Christian theologian has eer arrived at a more convincing statement of the relevance and distance between the human and divine than he" (P. 158).

> under what feelings…. I will do this or that, say I to myself, in that great receptacle of my mind, stored with images of things so many and so great, and this or that might be.[272]

For Niebuhr, these words evince a power to self-consciousness that stirs "…a sense of amazement in Augustine and the conviction that *the limits of the self lie finally outside the self*."[273]

On this basis, Niebuhr argues that the height of self-consciousness goes beyond mere "ideas" presented through reason, but one that presents the self as that which has "…the capacity to transcend temporal process, and the ultimate power of self-determination and self-transcendence…."[274] Niebuhr states:

> The human spirit in its depth and height reaches into eternity and that this vertical dimension is more important for the understanding of man than merely his rational capacity for forming general concepts. This latter capacity is derived from the former. It is, as it were, a capacity for horizontal perspectives over the wide world, made possible by the height at which the human spirit is able to survey the scene."[275]

Simply stated, self-transcendence goes infinitely beyond reason,[276] as it is capable of capturing a broader and deeper view of the self. Therefore, human uniqueness, and the way in which the human should regard one's "spirit" or transcendence, should not be on terms of reason alone, but additionally self-consideration.

Furthermore, while there is more to one's transcendence than mere reason, there is indeed still a limit to that self-transcendence, even in the mind. Augustine states, "Great is the power of memory, a fearful thing, O my God, a deep and boundless manifoldness; and this thing is the mind, and this am I myself. What am I then, O my God? What nature am I?"[277] Appropriately,

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[272] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, E.B. Pusey (tr.), (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937), P. 228-229
[273] NDHN, P. 156.
[274] Ibid.
[275] NDHN, P. 157.
[276] In his book, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. P. 137), Ronald Stone states, "The image of God interpreted by Augustine uses and moves beyond the faculty of reason in human effort to transcend its limits and find its home only in God."
[277] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, P. 238.*

Augustine finds the limit of his mind at the very place Niebuhr is most vexed: what is the human being? Thus, reason is not the sole unifying principle of human existence, and cannot understand itself from the position of its cognitive faculties alone.

Based upon his conception of self-transcendence and the lingering problem of self-understanding, Niebuhr turns to Kierkegaard to construct his understanding of freedom as an aspect of self-transcendence.[278] Kierkegaard likens the human spirit to dreaming; he states, "The spirit in man is dreaming…. In this state there is peace and repose…for there is indeed nothing against which to strive."[279] Similar to Augustine's self-transcendence, Kierkegaard's "dreaming" spirit is above all constraints and is essentially free. Kierkegaard continues, "Dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality…."[280] In other words, the self has the capacity for self-determination. From this conception of self-transcendence, Niebuhr constructs the basis for his understanding of freedom. He states:

> Human capacity for self-transcendence is also the basis of human freedom and thereby the uniqueness of the individual. Human consciousness not only transcends natural process but it transcends itself. It thereby gains the possibility for those endless variations and elaborations of human capacities which characterize human existence. Every impulse of nature in man can be modified in countless variations. In consequence no human individual is like another, no matter how similar their heredity and environment…"[281]

In other words, self-transcendence is that basis upon which freedom is realized. One can draw from the limitless abyss of the human mind—for which "there is indeed nothing against which to strive"—towards the actualization of its own self-determination.

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[278] The influence of Søren Kierkegaard on Niebuhr's dialectical framework, particularly as it regards human nature, is widely acknowledged in the academic community. In his book, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007. P. 47), Edward J. Carnell states that Kierkegaard "bequeathed" to Niebuhr his "dialectical framework." According to Robert H. Ayers in his essay, "Methodological, Epistemological and Ontological Motifs in the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr" (in *Modern Theology* Vol. 7 No. 2, January 1991. P. 154), what makes Niebuhr's dialectical framework so similar to Kierkegaard's is that it is focused on the self (as opposed to history) and "…opts for a both/and rather than an exclusive either/or appraisal of alternate doctrines."
[279] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Reidar Thomte (tr.), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), P. 41.
[280] Ibid.
[281] NDHN, P. 55.

However, self-transcendence is not only limited in its necessary service of the human will and in what it can imagine ("What am I then, O my God?"), but it is also limited in what it can achieve, as the infinite powers of the mind are limited in their ultimate expression to the confines of nature and the realm of choice. The collision of utter freedom of the mind on the one hand, and the finite realm of action on the other, creates for both Kierkegaard and Niebuhr the ultimate "paradox" humans experience in the concepts of self-determination and natural or historical-determination. Niebuhr quotes Kierkegaard to express this paradox:

> Truth [in the human situation] is exactly the identity of choosing and determining and of being chosen and determined. What I choose I do not determine, for if it were not determined I could not choose it; and yet if I did not determine it through my choice I would not really choose it. It is: if it were not I could not choose it. It is not: but becomes reality through my choice, or else my choice were an illusion…. I am myself the eternal personality…. But what is this myself? It is the most abstract and yet at the same time the most concrete of all realities. It is freedom.[282]

Effectively, for both Niebuhr and Kierkegaard, the paradox of freedom and finiteness is a reality of the human situation. However, for Niebuhr, while this paradox appears troubling, the goal is to not break this apparent tension, lest one be consumed with illusions about oneself. Niebuhr knows that through this paradox, one can understand "…that the self in the highest reaches of its self-consciousness is still the mortal and finite self."[283] Niebuhr will argue that this arrangement of self—while immediately observable through self-understanding—is uniquely expressed and held together in the Christian doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, while other non-Christian perspectives tend to negate one in their effort to assert the other. [284]

Additionally, for Niebuhr, one's freedom is especially important in the realm of ethics. For Niebuhr, freedom provides the occasion for both human creativity and action within one's environment, but also the occasion for destruction. He states, "The freedom of his spirit enables

[282] Ibid., P. 163.
[283] Ibid., P. 170.
[284] Ibid.

him to use the forces and processes of nature creatively; but his failure to observe the limits of his finite existence causes him to defy the forms and restraints of both nature and reason."[285] In essence, freedom is not in itself ethically good or bad, it is *ambiguous*. However, freedom is also the basis upon which good and evil emerge, and ultimately, one's responsibility. Niebuhr states, "The essence of man is his freedom. Sin is committed in that freedom. Sin can therefore not be attributed to a defect in his essence. It can only be understood as a self-contradiction, made possible by the fact of his freedom but not following necessarily from it."[286] To put it another way, if human beings were not free, all destruction and evil, all creativity and goodness, would be a product, not of the self, but of certain determined or designed features which lie outside and over top the human; i.e. causality, history, divine providence, etc. Therefore, Niebuhr argues that responsibility exists uniquely as a product of a free, transcendent self.

In conclusion, Augustine's understanding of consciousness and Kierkegaard's paradox of freedom present the basis upon which Niebuhr understands self-transcendence. According to Augustine, on the one hand, human spirit is a powerful feature of humanity that stretches beyond reason. However, it is limited in what it can understand about the self. According to Kierkegaard, human spirit is ultimately free, but is tempered in the realm of nature to the point that it expresses itself as paradox. Therefore, Niebuhr's view of human spirit is an uneasy realm of infinite possibilities that can only be expressed in a finite realm of action. This uneasiness is that place where good and evil must be articulated, and where responsibility must be realized and maintained.

[285] Ibid., P. 17.
[286] Ibid.

C. Consciousness: Understanding Oneself and the World from a Governing Center

"Consciousness," Niebuhr defines, "is a capacity for surveying the world and determining action from a governing centre."[287] To put it another way, Niebuhr views consciousness as the ability of the human spirit to direct the self towards preferable actions from the position of a presumed authoritative and unifying principle. In order to explain this view of consciousness in more detail, this section will demonstrate Niebuhr's understanding of how one's "governing centre" emerges as a necessity, the tendency of obscuring one's governing center, and Niebuhr's argument for myth—specifically, the Christian myth—as the most clarifying form of a governing center.

Due to the paradoxes of transcendence and creatureliness, freedom and finiteness, and due to the vexing problem that stands at the center of self-understanding, Niebuhr argues that the human spirit is *homeless*.[288] The human is not entirely a "child of nature," nor is the human entirely transcendent. Therefore, the question of what the human is presses him or her beyond the self to find some unifying principle. Niebuhr states:

> The rational faculty by which he orders and interprets his experience…is itself a part of the finite world which man seeks to understand. The only principle for the comprehension of the whole (the whole which includes both himself and the world) is, therefore, beyond his comprehension. Man is thus in the position of being unable to comprehend himself in his full stature of freedom without a principle of comprehension which is beyond his comprehension.[289]

It is in this way that the human being's homelessness "…is the ground of all religion; for the self which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world."[290] Essentially, the human cannot remain homeless without also rejecting all meaning and purpose in human life. It is necessary for one to find a home in order to understand oneself,

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[287] Ibid., P. 14.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid., P. 125.
[290] Ibid., P. 14.

one's purpose, and one's actions. The human needs a "principle of comprehension which is beyond his comprehension."[291]

Ultimately, Niebuhr articulates the religious grounds for understanding human nature in terms of faith. The unifying principle from the position of the human's homelessness is not understandable from its animalistic or transcendent natures, but instead must presuppose an ultimate perspective through which one may be known and understood. Niebuhr states: "Human life points beyond itself… It can, therefore, understand the total dimension in which it stands only by making faith the presupposition of its understanding."[292] In other words, faith is the only means by which one can understand the self from an external position, thus only faith can offer a governing center most true to human capacity and limitation.

However, at this point it must be stressed once again that no governing center or presupposition of faith can change the human. To quote Niebuhr once more, "No philosophy or religion can change the structure of human existence. That structure involves individuality in terms of both the natural fact of a particular body and the spiritual fact of self-transcendence."[293] The tension between the two "obvious facts" about human nature remain the same in perpetuity. "But," Niebuhr continues, "religions and philosophies have an important bearing upon the possibility of…maintaining itself in such a position of transcendence."[294] In other words, while no religious or philosophical presuppositions can change human nature, they can position human nature in a way that either better reveals or obscures the way in which the human can positively or negatively impact reality.

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[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid., P. 15.
[293] Ibid., P. 69.
[294] Ibid.

Unfortunately, for Niebuhr, humanity tends towards philosophical and religious presuppositions that resort to "premature solutions" of the self to unify one's perspective of the world. This in turn produces illusions of self that become woven into the fabric of human understanding, tempting one to become more natural on the one hand, or more transcendent on the other, than what he or she in reality is.[295] "Nature and reason," Niebuhr proclaims, "are thus the two gods of modern man…."[296] Nature and reason are the dominant presumptions of faith in the modern world, which vie for preeminence as the ultimate unifying principle of reality. However, as Niebuhr argues, these principles are ultimately expressed in the loss of the self entirely, whether it is articulated as "…pure mind or pure nature."[297] These presuppositions do not maintain the self "…in such a position of transcendence." Effectively, the self loses its transcendence in its very attempt to articulate it more fully, by doing so exclusively from the position of nature on the one hand, or the human spirit on the other.

Niebuhr calls the loss of self-transcendence simply, "the loss of self,"[298] and demonstrates generally two categories of thought coming from each direction of the question regarding human nature. The first category, Niebuhr argues, articulates the question of human nature from the position of one's animalistic or base faculties—the god of nature. The second category articulates the question of human nature from the position of one's unique or transcendent categories—the god of human spirit.

Regarding the god of nature, Niebuhr addresses Naturalism and Romanticism,[299] arguing that in their very attempt to seek utter freedom from the position of the human's animalistic

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[295] Ibid., P. 95.
[296] Ibid.
[297] NDHN, P. 23
[298] Ibid., P. 68-92
[299] In NDHN (P. 92), Niebuhr argues that while Romanticism loses self-transcendence because the self is subordinated to the tribe, he does make one exception in the case of Nietzsche. He states, "Only in Nietzschean romanticism is the individual preserved; but there he becomes the vehicle of daemonic [sic] religion because he

features, they ultimately either reduce "…consciousness itself to purely mechanical proportions,"[300] or the self is "quickly subordinated to the unique and self-justifying individuality of the social collective."[301] In other words, the more one seeks to find freedom by throwing off the shackles of civilized life or reason so that one may resemble ever closer the human's animal kin, the less free—and more bound—the human is to natural impulses, will, and basic causality, thus losing self-transcendence in either the machinery of nature or in its subordination to the tribe.

Regarding the god of human spirit, Niebuhr argues that Rationalism, Mysticism, and Idealism obscure—if not demonize—the human as a child of nature in order to discover one's unity in a transcendent mind. Niebuhr begins by asserting Augustine's observations regarding the seemingly eternal depths and heights of self-transcendence, but then reasserts Augustine's discovered limitation: "[the human] stands too completely outside of both nature and reason to understand himself in terms of either without misunderstanding himself…."[302] Niebuhr argues that while those adherents to the god of human spirit rightly observe the transcendence of the self, they do not detect the limitations of such a position and its implications. Niebuhr argues that, effectively, "…if man lacks a further revelation [faith presupposition]…he will also misunderstand himself when he seeks to escape the conditions of nature…."[303] Therefore, "He will end by seeking absorption in a divine reality which is at once all and nothing."[304] The unfettered freedom of the transcendent self—that which seeks complete release from the

knows no law but his own will-to-power and has no God but his own unlimited ambition." His observations about Nietzsche more closely resemble "the sober, sceptical [sic] and earth-bound Montaigne" (P. 64): the self is lost in the impulses of the will.

[300] Ibid., P. 70.
[301] Ibid., P. 92.
[302] Ibid., P. 15.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

constraints of nature—loses the self by reducing it to "…merely an aspect of universal mind" (Idealism),[305] one that is "…swallowed up into an undifferentiated divine unity" (Mysticism),[306] or "…lost in the attainment of a rationality" (Rationalism).[307]

Essentially, faith in "the two gods of modern man" results in the loss of self-transcendence through their "premature solutions" to the problem of Niebuhr's original question of self-understanding. One loses self-transcendence in an ironic effort to discover more freedom within the human's natural impulses or tribe, while the other loses self-transcendence by negating the nature over which the self transcends.

The challenge then for Niebuhr is to discover a governing center or presupposition of faith which presumes neither the preeminence of nature over self, nor the preeminence of self over nature, but rather can maintain both within a state of tension which can "…do justice to both the uniqueness of man and his affinities with the world of nature below him…."[308] This challenge appears difficult, for whatever form of reason Niebuhr must use seems already grounded in a pre-determined foundation which presupposes either the human's affinity with nature or the human's transcendence over it.[309] Niebuhr states, "…for reason which seeks to bring all things into terms of rational coherence is tempted to make one known thing the principle of explanation and to derive all other things from it. Its most natural inclination is to

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[305] Ibid., P. 75.
[306] Ibid., P. 77.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid., P. 4.
[309] It should be affirmed at this point that Niebuhr shares many presumptions about epistemology with those of post-liberalism and postmodernity. Regarding the former, Lovin, in his book, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (P. 96), argues that Niebuhr's work appears to be, "…an anticipation of Christian narrative ethics." See also: Jacob L. Goodson, *Narrative Theology and the Hermeneutical Virtues: Humility, Patience, Prudence* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Books, 2015. P. 48). Regarding postmodernity, see: Eyal J. Naveh, "Beyond Illusion and Despair: Niebuhr's Liberal Legacy in a Divided American Culture" in *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited: Engagements with an American Original* (Daniel Rice, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009. P. 278); Naveh, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Non-Utopian Liberalism* (Sussex, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2002); Ronald Stone, "Review of 'Reinhold Niebuhr and Non-utopian Liberalism'" in *Journal of Religion* (Vol. 84 Is. 4, October 2004. P. 639).

make itself the ultimate principle…."[310] In other words, if one presumes nature's preeminence over self or the self's preeminence over nature, reason will follow from that foundation accordingly, ultimately obscuring the self in its attempt to understand it. Therefore, Niebuhr's unifying principle must by some measure be *unreasonable* for it to reasonably maintain both the human as a "child of nature" and the human-as-spirit.

Regarding his process of establishing reason from a place that is unreasonable, in his book, *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr sets out to detail his unifying principle by reflecting on a passage of scripture, taken from II Corinthians 6:8, where the apostle Paul observes that Christians are "deceivers yet true."[311] Given that the preceding clause states, "by evil report and good report,"[312] Niebuhr suggests that certain reports "…were circulated about [Paul] as charges of deception and dishonesty."[313] Niebuhr, however, interprets Paul's response as being, on the one hand, an admission of his deception, yet on the other hand, "true." This construct of reasoning affirms for Niebuhr a way of understanding reality that must first make passage through a lie: "For what is true in the Christian religion," Niebuhr proclaims, "can be expressed only in symbols which contain a certain degree of provisional and superficial deception."[314] In other words, in regards to understanding the self in its full dimension, the truth of one's unity must emerge from a principle that is at first unreasonable.

In order to perceive a fuller picture of self without succumbing to a form of reason which already presupposes—and prematurely resolves—the unity of self from an insufficient position, Niebuhr argues for the explanatory power of myth over and against that of more modern forms

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[310] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiney of Man Vol. I*, P. 13.
[311] In the *New Revised Standard Version*, the full verse of II Corinthians 6:8 states, "in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as imposters, and yet are true."
[312] This is Niebuhr's translation. The *New Revised Standard Version* states, "in ill repute and good repute" instead.
[313] BTR, P. 3.
[314] Ibid.

of reason. To do this, Niebuhr uses the example of a painter to demonstrate how an artist has to effectively "lie" on a two-dimensional canvas in order to depict something that is three-dimensional in reality. Niebuhr states:

> …artists are forced to use deceptive symbols when they seek to portray two dimensions of space upon the single dimension of a flat canvas. Every picture which suggests depth and perspective draws angles not as they are but as they appear to the eye when it looks into depth. Parallel lines are not drawn as parallel lines but are made to appear as if they converged on the horizon; for so they appear to the eye when it envisages a total perspective.[315]

Likewise, without a mythical governing center, the self appears only by way of two contrasting dimensions (nature and spirit) that cannot make sense of the full stature of self. The symbolism of myths, however, can create a level of deception that is necessary to present a fuller depiction of reality. Niebuhr concludes, "The necessity of picturing things as they seem rather than as they are…is a striking analogy, in the field of space, of the problem of religion in the sphere of time."[316] In order to more clearly see and understand the unity of self which mere observation only implicitly portrays,[317] Niebuhr needs the deceptive qualities of myth as a unifying principle—presupposed by faith—to tell the truth.

Ultimately, Niebuhr needs a unifying principle of self which grants a proper height of self-transcendence and freedom without sacrificing its "obvious" depth of creatureliness and finiteness, which can serve as the basis upon which one articulates both the self and the world. Thus, this understanding of myth is the manner in which Niebuhr will correlatively affirm the authority of biblical revelation on the basis of its ability to answer his central question regarding

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[315] Ibid., P. 5.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Regarding the self, it is important to remember, as Daniel James Malotky states (Reinhold Niebuhr's Paradox: Groundwork for Social Responsibility" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 31 Is. 1, Spring 2003. P. 114), that "First, this concept [of the self] arises from general revelation and the negative apologetic. Second, it points not to our ability to escape mythological representations of ourselves but the need to cast human history in the form of a story. It posits that the contradiction between freedom and finitude in the concrete can only be resolved in the moment, near in advance. Only narrative can represent this, though we must take care to specify that even narrative represents a level of abstraction from reality." In other words, the self arises from nature, but is more clarified—particularly in the realm of action and ethics—in the realm of myth or revelation.

human nature. While Niebuhr's view of revelation to this end has been criticized by some for its lack of authority,[318] it should be stressed that to Niebuhr, scripture has all the authority possible as a presupposition of faith; one that illuminates the self and the world in a way nothing else can.[319] Scripture, for Niebuhr, is the only means by which humans can *clarify* the unity of self and its implications in the realm of ethics.[320]

Over and against the human tendency to prematurely resolve the question which stands at the center of human nature and spirit, Niebuhr discovers in scripture a symbolic expression of self that articulates the fullness of self-transcendence without sacrificing the very obvious fact of one's animalistic nature. That symbol in the Christian scriptures is the *Imago Dei*—the Image of God. Niebuhr states, "In its purest form the Christian view of man regards man as a unity of God-likeness and creatureliness in which he remains a creature even in the highest spiritual dimensions of his existence and may reveal elements of the image of God even in the lowliest

[318] In his book, *With the Grain of the Universe* (P. 131), Hauerwas criticized Niebuhr, stating, "Niebuhr felt free, in an almost Alice-in-Wonderland fashion, to make words mean anything he wanted them to mean." In her work, *The Omission of the Holy Spirit from Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology* (New York, NY: Claredon Press, 1997. P. 216), Rachel King places revelation in the category of "Ideas Reinhold Niebuhr Loves but Does not Believe to be True." It should be said that both of these critiques, however, imply a knowable intentionality behind Niebuhr's work that is impossible to draw from his texts. For an elaboration on this response to both Hauerwas and King, see: Kevin Carnahan, "Reading Reinhold Niebuhr against Himself Again: On Theological Language and Divine Action" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol. 18 No. 2 (April 2016).

[319] If anything, Tillich criticizes Niebuhr for his use of scripture as an exclusively correct text. In his lecture, "Sin and Grace in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr" (Landon, P. 33), Tillich states, "He has a rather low evaluation of the non-Biblical literature, especially if this literature has the bad luck to have been written by a philosopher from Plato on. He has a special method of dealing with representatives of Western philosophy, a method which one perhaps could call the critical-comparing method. He quotes a passage of Paul, and then in opposition to it a passage of Plato, or of Spinoza, or even worse, of Hegel; and then he says, 'Now here you have the Biblical truth and there you have the philosophical error.'"

[320] By the term "clarify" this does not mean that myth or revelation resolves the problem of the human's understanding of self, but it does grant a fuller picture of self in order to better position oneself to understand answers regarding conduct. In his book, *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008. P. 90), John G. Stackhouse describes this "clarifying" effect of Niebuhr's approach to scripture best when he states, "To reveal truth in a way that properly balances various elements and communicates well across a variety of cultures, God has resorted to the genre of story, of myth—understood as a narrative and symbol set that articulate abiding truth ('this is the way things are and have been') but not, as Christian tradition has believed, historical truth ('this is the way things once happened')."

aspects of his natural life."[321] For Niebuhr, such a myth that renders the human as the Image of God simultaneously "lies" and yet tells the truth; it is a lie in so far as its unity cannot be made sense of from the position of nature or reason; it is true, however, in that it conveys a unity of self which makes better sense of the paradox in which one stands. Niebuhr states, "[the human] can, therefore, understand the total dimension in which it stands only by making faith the presupposition of its understanding…."[322] The symbol of the Image of God does not reduce the human to nature, nor absorb one into an undifferentiated eternity, but understands the self in its complete unity, properly situated between the twin traps of ultimate transcendence and complete uniformity with nature.

In conclusion, Niebuhr views consciousness as a transcendent self which surveys the world and determines action from a governing center. However, that governing center cannot be found through reason or nature alone, as one is obscured once the other is regarded as preeminent. Therefore, the basis upon which a governing center must be understood is established from the position of homelessness. While the human's homelessness is a problem unto oneself, that problem is aggravated by premature solutions which flatten out one's perspective of self and reality by subjugating one aspect of the self unto the other, thus losing the self entirely to either the mechanistic properties of nature and tribal unity on the one hand, or an undifferentiated realm of spirit or reason on the other. Therefore, Niebuhr argues, one must render a unifying principle of faith to act as one's governing center, one which transcends reason to establish a unity of self that does not presume such height as to destroy one's depth, and does not presume such depth so as to destroy one's height. The initial presupposition of faith which Niebuhr sees as the foundation of such a governing center is the *Imago Dei.*

[321] NDHN, P. 150.
[322] Ibid., P. 158.

II: Ethical Responsibility and the Easy & Uneasy Conscience

Niebuhr's understanding of ethical responsibility should first be understood in the *negative*, as an attack upon what he calls the "easy conscience" of the modern human. It is through this process of critique that he, at least in part, negatively validates the Christian perspective of human nature, which generates what he calls the "uneasy conscience." Therefore, this section will first examine (A) the loss of responsibility through his concept of the "easy conscience," then will turn to (B) his more positive argument from Christian scriptures for his conception of the "uneasy conscience." Finally, this section will conclude (C) with an analysis of the two primary consequences of maintaining an easy conscience, which shall foreshadow the Niebuhrian critiques of Mumford and Marcuse yet to come.

A. The Easy Conscience

Up to this point, Niebuhr's conceptualization of humans as a problem unto themselves—and the human's tendency to avoid that problem through premature solutions—has predominantly been expressed abstractly as a philosophical or theological problem. However, Niebuhr's primary concern regarding the problem of self emerges in the realm of ethics,[323] as that problem is "aggravated" by establishing an "easy" or "complacent conscience" at the center of human behavior.[324] Effectively, prematurely solving the paradoxes at the center of the human

[323] It should be noted at this point that all of Niebuhr's work regarding the self and transcendence was directed primarily towards developing his understanding of ethics. As Gilkey notes in his essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History" (in *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Nathan A. Scott Jr., ed., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974. P. 42 *fn*), "…when Niebuhr explicates the meaning of this transcendence and yet relatedness, it is not the ontological meaning of such a concept that concerns him, but the ethical and political meanings; i.e., a relation to transcendence answers the question of how a group can find meaning in its common life without making itself the center of history and so doing injustice to others."

[324] Niebuhr begins his chapter, titled, "The Easy Conscience of Modern Man" (NDHN, Chapter 4), with the following pronouncement: "Our introductory analysis of modern views of human nature has established the *complacent conscience* of modern man as the one unifying force amidst a wide variety of anthropological conceptions." Emphasis added.

situation is problematic because it removes both the complicity and responsibility of the human being that motivates one in the realm of action, thereby externalizing both evil and moral obligation.

Niebuhr argues that the easy conscience is a product of premature solutions regarding one's understanding of self. Niebuhr states, "Nature and reason are thus the two gods of modern man, and sometimes the two are one. *In either case man is essentially secure because he is not seriously estranged from the realm of harmony and order*."[325] In other words, the human's tendency towards premature solutions—seeking to understand oneself either primarily from the position of one's nature or one's reason—more fully aligns the self with that which one presumes is the dominant feature, thus leading one to presuppose a certain goodness about oneself. One is "secure" because he or she is never too far from the realm of harmony and order, whether that harmony and order arises from nature or descends from the mind. Ultimately, in the realm of ethics, the human only has to become more like what one already is. Niebuhr states, "Either the rational man or the natural man is conceived as essentially good, and it is only necessary for man either to rise from the chaos of nature to the harmony of mind or to descend from the chaos of spirit to the harmony of nature and order to be saved."[326] To put it another way, the easy conscience occurs either when one places undue faith in spirit to resolve the problems of nature, or undue faith in nature to resolve the problems of spirit. The human being is "secure" in one's goodness, and is easily saved by simply becoming more of what one already is perceived to be.

According to Niebuhr, perhaps the most destructive feature of the easy conscience is the inability to discover evil in the self; it is reduced, rather, to some "defiance of nature's and

[325] NDHN, P. 95. Emphasis added.
[326] Ibid., P. 25.

reason's laws."[327] Niebuhr states, "He always imagines himself betrayed into this defiance either by some accidental corruption in his past history or by some sloth of reason."[328] The Naturalist and Romanticist may lose the innocence of nature,[329] the Rationalist may err, and the Idealist may suffer from "cultural lag;"[330] but none of these, however, can articulate evil and responsibility from the position of human choice or human freedom. No human can help the fact that they are subject to a loss of innocence, that they err, or that they are part of a culture whose educational, and therefore ethical, development has stagnated. There is no responsibility here because there is no freedom here, as self-transcendence has become flattened by way of a singular dimension of self-perception.

B. The Uneasy Conscience

If the *easy conscience* is the result of the human's "premature solutions" regarding the problem of the human's homelessness, the *uneasy conscience* is the product of a sober recognition of the complexities and mysteries of the human condition, unified by its apparent paradoxes and tensions. The uneasy conscience is "…the protest of man's essential nature against his present state…the sense of inner conflict which expresses itself in all moral life."[331] This inner conflict and protest against the human's present state, however, should not be understood as a defect of human nature, but is the necessary seedbed for ethical responsibility

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[327] Ibid., P. 96.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Niebuhr argues, "The modern naturalist, whether romantic or rationalistic, has an easy conscience because he believes that he has not strayed very far from, and can easily return to, the innocency [sic] of nature." (NDHN, P. 104)
[330] In NDHN (P. 112-113), Niebuhr argues that the idealism of Alfred N. Whitehead and Dewey "…both arrive at a 'cultural lag' theory of human evil and both hope for a society which will ultimately be governed purely by rational suasion rather than force. Their arrival at this common goal by contrasting methods is indicative of the power of moral optimism in modern culture… [They] are forced to construct a very shaky and inadequate point of reference from which they can operate against the confusion of natural impulse." Essentially, what Niebuhr means by cultural lag is that the people of a given society simply have not caught up yet to establish a functional morality over their society. All evil is, thus, a group of people who are effectively uneducated in the correct way to live.
[331] NDHN, P. 263.

and motivation. Reflecting on Niebuhr, Thomas C. Berg cogently states, "It is precisely our 'uneasy conscience'…that helps spur our unrealized moral possibilities."[332] Effectively, it is not the human's uneasy conscience which should be avoided or mitigated, but rather it should be exposed, enlarged, and maintained. This maintenance of the uneasy conscience, the inner tensions of the self, will be supported by Niebuhr's use of the Christian doctrines of the Imago Dei and Original Sin.

As previously demonstrated, Niebuhr's understanding of the human as the Imago Dei supplies for him a truth told by way of a "lie." It is a lie in that it is a view of self that is false from the position of human-as-transcendent or human-as-contingent. However, it tells the truth in that it does not forsake the human's contingency to nature in favor of its transcendence, nor does it forsake the human's transcendence in favor of its natural contingencies. In other words, evil does not exist as a necessary concomitant to the human's composition: evil is not purely one's animalistic impulses, nor is it purely one's rational or spiritual faculties. Niebuhr states, "[The Christian doctrine of Imago Dei] insists on man's weakness, dependence, and finiteness on his involvement in the necessities and contingencies of the nature world, without, however, regarding this finiteness as, of itself, a source of evil in man…."[333] The doctrine of Imago Dei, for Niebuhr, properly situates the human being in a way that pays proper tribute to both one's height and depth, but one that must be maintained within the proper tensions of itself in order to maintain freedom, and therefore, responsibility.

For Niebuhr, then, a secondary myth is necessary to maintain the human-as-Imago-Dei within its proper position of tensions: the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. The doctrine of

[332] Thomas C. Berg, "Church-State Relations and the Social Ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr," in North Carolina Law Review Vol. 73 No. 4 (1995), P. 1590.
[333] NDHN, P. 150.

Original Sin, as expressed in the myth of the Garden of Eden, is a story of human beings wrestling with the limits their own freedom. Essentially, Satan tempts Adam and Eve "to break and transcend the limits which God has set" for them.[334] In other words, the human is tempted to extend beyond what he or she was created to be: the Imago Dei; it is to reject the uneasy homelessness in which the human is grounded.

However, this temptation does not arise out of nowhere, but it was occasioned by the serpent, who simply made Adam and Eve cognizant of "the limited and dependent character of [their] existence and knowledge."[335] Ultimately, sin is the inevitable result of one's rejection of the parameters of the Imago Dei, but that rejection is preconditioned by an anxiety regarding the human's lowly condition.

For Niebuhr, the concept of anxiety, as borrowed from Kierkegaard,[336] is central to his conception of sin, and by extension, the uneasy conscience. While Satan was necessary to hold the position of the progenitor of anxiety,[337] Niebuhr argues that anxiety is an inevitable—though not necessary—byproduct of the immutable human composition. He states, "In short, man, being both free and bound, both limited and limitless, is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved."[338] As a "homeless" creature who cannot be understood completely from the position of one's

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[334] Ibid., P. 180.
[335] Ibid., P. 181.
[336] In his book, *The Constant Dialogue: Reinhold Niebuhr and American Intellectual Culture* (New York, NY: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. P. 158), Martin Halliwell makes the Kierkegaard-Niebuhr connection complete on the point of an inescapable sense of anxiety: "Like Kierkegaard…[Niebuhr] saw anxiety as a precondition of being human…." In NDHN (P. 182 *fn*) Niebuhr also footnotes Kierkegaard as being a source for his concept that anxiety leads to sin. He states, "Kierkegaard's analysis of the relation of anxiety to sin is the profoundest in Christian thought."
[337] For Niebuhr, the character of Satan was a necessary feature of the myth of the Garden of Eden. In NDHN (P. 180) he states, "The devil fell before man fell, which is to say that man's rebellion against God is not an act of sheer perversity, nor does it follow inevitably from the situation in which he stands."
[338] Ibid., P. 182.

transcendence or one's creatureliness, the human is anxious, as he or she can always imagine what one can never possess. The human can transcend nature, but in so doing knows he or she must die. The human can act upon one's reason, but there is no guarantee of the desired outcome. The human can have unlimited ambitions, but must face very limiting historical or natural realities. Anxiety is an inevitable existential collision of freedom and transcendence with finitude and contingency, and it is due to one's immutable composition. It is what Kierkegaard calls "the dizziness of freedom." [339]

But, as in the case of the Garden, anxiety is also the seedbed for sin. Niebuhr states, "Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness. Anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation…. Yet anxiety is not sin."[340] Anxiety tempts the human to sin, for the human's imagination and freedom far exceeds one's natural limitations, and drives the human to carry out that which is destructive in order to attain that which is unattainable. In Niebuhr's words, the human is "…tempted by the situation in which he stands."[341]

Furthermore, Niebuhr argues that there are generally two forms of sin—both of which are a result of the human's anxious disposition, and both commit the original sin of denying one's intractable composition in favor of illusion. These two sins are pride and sensuality, and both correspond to the two directions that one may be drawn to obscure the uneasiness of the human condition. Niebuhr states:

> When anxiety has conceived it brings forth both pride and sensuality. Man falls into pride when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing himself into a 'mutable good,' by losing himself in some natural vitality.[342]

[339] Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, P. 61.
[340] NDHN, P. 182-183.
[341] Ibid., P. 17.
[342] Ibid., P. 186.

For Niebuhr, pride is choosing and acting upon an illusion of transcendence in an effort to mitigate one's natural limitations, while sensuality is choosing and acting upon an illusion of one's limitations in an effort to mitigate one's capabilities. Essentially, the anxiety which accompanies the human's homeless condition tempts one to falsely eliminate those tensions in favor of an illusion of control when one has none, or an illusion of not having control when one indeed does.

Given the uneasy and paradoxical anthropology upon which Christian responsibility is established, the human's chief ethical obligation therefore is to properly discern the capabilities of one's freedom and transcendence in relationship to one's finiteness and limitations. For Niebuhr, it is for this reason that the primary goal of ethics is to *clarify* the human being and the world, not simply to make oneself better or to more closely aspire towards one's ideal, as that in itself can lead towards pride. The uneasy conscience is precisely that internal struggle that actively resists both the pride of one's transcendence, and the sensuality of one's contingency. The application of the uneasy conscience is perhaps best expressed in Niebuhr's serenity prayer: "*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."*[343] In other words, humans must be aware of and accept their limitations, know when their transcendence can better themselves and the world, and ultimately have the discernment and clarity to distinguish one from the other, for each vexation harbors its own temptations to sin.

While other views concerning human nature disregard anxiety as an impetus in their construction of self, Niebuhr argues that Christian anthropology places it directly at the center of

[343] While the authorship of this prayers has been in question, new evidence has all but concluded that Niebuhr was indeed the person who authored it. See: Fred R. Shapiro, "Who Wrote the Serenity Prayer?" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (28 April 2014).

human freedom. This makes the human's capacity for evil an inevitable result of human freedom, and not a defect of one's nature or some purely external force. This is why, Niebuhr argues, all other anthropological views invariably express themselves as an easy conscience, while Christianity expresses itself as an uneasy conscience. Niebuhr's Christian conception of sin is attributable to human choice—or human freedom—not to some external or essential force. Niebuhr states, "Original sin, which is by definition an inherited corruption, or at least an inevitable one, is nevertheless not to be regarded as belonging to his essential nature and therefore is not outside the realm of his responsibility."[344] Essentially, because sin is an inevitable corruption and not a necessary corruption—because sin comes from the same realm of freedom as one's goodness—the human is responsible. Evil is not due simply to some natural defect, miscalculation, or cultural lag, but it is deployed from the realm of one's free will.

Therefore, based upon the faith presupposition of the Imago Dei, as properly maintained with its corresponding doctrine of Original Sin, Christianity maintains the proper position from which ethical responsibility can be maintained by way of an uneasy conscience regarding the human's very composition. Niebuhr states:

> Christianity, therefore, issues inevitably in religious expression of an uneasy conscience. Only within terms of the Christian faith can man not only understand the reality of the evil in himself but escape the error of attributing that evil to any one but himself. It is possible of course to point out that man is tempted by the situation in which he stands.[345]

In other words, Niebuhr argues that, between its doctrines of the Imago Dei and Original Sin, Christianity offers a unique basis upon which responsibility can be maintained by way of an uneasy conscience.

[344] Ibid., P. 242.
[345] Ibid., P. 17.

C. Consequences of the Easy Conscience: Salvation and Anxiety

The easy conscience, as derived from premature solutions regarding the vexations inherent to the human situation, has further consequences than simply the elimination of ethical responsibility. The easy conscience is also the basis by which one's understanding of the world and self are further compounded and obscured. This section will describe two consequences of the easy conscience: the first (1) will show how the easy conscience obscures one's perception of the world, culminating in unrealistic attempts to save oneself from its various evils, and the second (2) will show how the easy conscience compounds the problem of anxiety.

1. Obscured World; Unrealistic Salvation

The easy conscience tempts the human towards illusions that are inconsistent with the reality one experiences in two ways: pride and sensuality.[346] Regarding pride, for those who do not consider the limitations of one's transcendence—one's reason and ideology—the realms of history, nature, and systems appear unrealistically manageable, changeable, and bendable towards one's predetermined harmony of nature.[347] Regarding sensuality, for those who forsake one's transcendence—one's capacities to enact change in those places governed by reason—the realms of history, nature, and systems appear incalcitrant, hopeless, and irredeemable; isolation and escapism then become the sources of salvation for the self. Regardless of whichever way one errs—towards pride or sensuality—due to the presumption that evil is always located in

[346] In CLCD (P. 9-10), Niebuhr makes a distinction between two types of self-righteousness—or easy consciences. First, "the children of light" are those whose high opinion of the self tempts them towards the illusion that self-interest can be brought "under the discipline of a more universal law and in harmony with a more universal good." To the children of light, their high opinion of self obscures their understanding of world as one that is manageable. The second form of the easy conscience is "the children of darkness" who are so aware of self-interest that there is no possibility for "law beyond the self." Thus, the cynicism of the children of darkness is a paralyzing, if not escaping or resigning, response to the *easy conscience*. For the children of darkness, their high opinion of self obscures their understanding of the world as one that is very much unmanageable.

[347] In IOAH (P. 66-67), Niebuhr observers the human's tendency to ignore "…his ambiguous position of being both creature and creator of the historical process and become unequivocally the master of his own destiny."

realms beyond one's freedom, the easy conscience must either conquer or escape that evil which originates outside of the self in order to establish a new realm of harmony and order. Thus, those with the easy conscience are perennially cursed to obscure the world they perceive, and evil is always either too easy to escape, or too easy to shape.

It is in this way that the easy conscience becomes observable within at least two positions on technological neutrality already observed. The Hard Instrumental Theory of Horton represents that expression of an easy conscience which posits that the addition of technology to society merely creates a new dynamic under which the human can manage, control, and bend to its will. While Horton's view of human nature was not specifically elaborated, it can be assumed that a very high view of human beings is necessary to imagine that its technological creations are essentially benign and manageable. The Substantive Theory of Ellul, on the other hand, represents that expression of an easy conscience which posits that the addition of technology to society creates a new form of evil which can only be escaped via mystical, historical, or eschatological events; the human is simultaneously evil and a helpless victim to evil due to some natural or historical defect, and therefore one is non-complicit. Both expressions are that of an easy conscience because neither detect evil as originating from within the realm of freedom and choice.

2. Compounded Anxiety

As previously shown, anxiety is what humans experience as a result of observing, or even fighting against, the permanence and immutable composition of one's homeless state. Niebuhr calls anxiety, "…the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness."[348] The human, endowed with the seemingly infinite capacities of spirit,

[348] NDHN, P. 182.

can never fully translate that which it can imagine into the finite realm of existence, thus the human is anxious. It is truly as Kierkegaard states, "the dizziness of freedom." [349] However, while anxiety is an inevitable concomitant to the human situation, such anxiety is ultimately compounded by the easy conscience.

"No philosophy or religion," Niebuhr states, "can change the structure of human existence,"[350] and as previously established, that structure is the seedbed for anxiety's inevitable manifestation. What this means is that no matter how transcendent or contingent one imagines the human being, one may establish an easy conscience, but one cannot escape anxiety. In fact, as it built upon premature solutions to the problem of the human situation, all philosophies and religions which espouse an easy conscience invariably lead to a compounded point of anxiety when fully realized. All that one can extrapolate most fully and completely regarding the human and one's ideals must at some point confront a limiting and finite reality. All forms of optimism eventually find their end in some form of dizziness. It is in this way that while philosophies and religions cannot change this internal structure of human nature—that structure which inevitably leads to anxiety—they can indeed flatten out, or diminish the self by premature solutions, and in so doing assuage the conscience of its guilt. Therefore, philosophies which harbor an easy conscience follow a predictable model; one which begins in optimism and ends in either despair, or a paralyzing anxiety that cannot articulate the self fully enough to conquer the evil it perceives in the world. Either way, however, the easy conscience results in a functional determinism; while one may affirm a changeable world, one's prescriptions are never enough to change the evil it perceives.

[349] Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, P. 61.
[350] NDHN, P. 69.

3. Conclusion

At this point it is important to reiterate that the easy conscience is a product of one's too simple solutions regarding the question of human nature. It is one's presumed anthropology—as either too transcendent or too naturally or historically contingent—that ultimately leads to whether one can articulate ethical responsibility. It is for this reason that this thesis will use this aspect of Niebuhr's thought to show that while Mumford and Marcuse are rightly aware that they cannot articulate technology as beyond critique nor fundamentally determined, each thinker's anthropology presumes an easy conscience that eliminates ethical responsibility and obscures their understanding of the technological society in a way that betrays their original conclusions. Both discover sources of salvation that are simply unrealistic, as both perceive evil as either too easy to escape or too easy to shape, and both consequently end with a compounded anxiety that repeatedly denies the conclusions to which their presumptions impel them.

Chapter 4: Lewis Mumford and the Easy Conscience

Introduction

The ultimate goal for this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Marcuse in order to create a new approach of technological engagement from the basis of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. While the previous chapter established the theological grounding of Niebuhr's anthropology with an emphasis on his construction of the *easy* and uneasy conscience, this will be the first of four chapters which will turn towards the prophetic method of applying Niebuhr's anthropology to expose the problematic anthropologies of Lewis Mumford and Herbert Marcuse—beginning with the former—by showing how both lead to an easy conscience.

In keeping with the goal of this chapter, this chapter will do three things. First, (I) this chapter will introduce Lewis Mumford's background and his particular goals as an Instrumental theorist. Second, (II) this chapter will analyze Mumford's anthropology, with special attention to how it contrasts with that of Niebuhr's. Finally, (III) this chapter will conclude by arguing that Mumford's anthropology expresses itself as an easy conscience, thus rendering ethical responsibility in the technological society problematic.

I: Lewis Mumford and Instrumental Theory

This section will explore the chosen representative of the Instrumental school of thought: Lewis Mumford. Born in New York City in 1895, Mumford became the 20th century's "leading proponent of…ecological thinking."[351] His contributions to art, philosophy, technological

[351] Donald Miller, ed., *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (New York, NY, Pantheon Books, 1986), P. 6.

criticism, and politics had, according to Henry Steele Commager, Jr., "a deeper and more lasting impact on the thinking of his generation than almost any other figure in public life."[352]

This section will accomplish two things. First (A), this section will look at Mumford's philosophical background, methodology, and his general goals for writing. The second part of this section (B) will analyze the kind of instrumentalism Mumford employs, showing how Mumford is indeed an instrumentalist, but also how he differs from others within the same school of thought.

A. Platonic Generalist, Romantic Humanist

Mumford's philosophical and methodological approach to technology begins from two places: (1) his self-styled "generalism," which is guided by a type of Platonic dialectic, and (2) his affinity for Humanism and Romanticism. This section will further detail each aspect to draw together a unified picture of Mumford's methodology and goals.

1. Mumford the Platonic Generalist

For Mumford, a Generalist is more than a person with a certain predetermined epistemology or method; a Generalist is an office. Mumford describes the burden of the Generalist as such: "…the generalist has a special office, that of bringing together widely separated fields, prudently fenced in by specialists into a larger common area, visible only from the air.[353] Mumford's understanding of a Generalist, and by extension himself, is akin to a vocation that is tasked with tying together the loose ends of all human thought that the "specialists" tend to disregard or overlook due to the specialist's myopia. Mumford states, "As a generalist I have taken advantage of a license too often self-denied by the specialized scholar:

[352] Henry Steele Commager, Jr., *A Tribute to Lewis Mumford* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute, 1982), P. 10.
[353] MOM, P. 16-17.

that of assembling the data from widely different areas in order to bring out a larger pattern that otherwise escapes observation."[354] In short, both Mumford's method and goal is to piece together the fragments of other scholars' work in order to create a more cohesive and comprehensive picture of human beings, society, and technology.

When considering the term, "generalist," it is important to understand the implied dichotomy tethered to its origin. Mumford is a generalist, over and against what he would consider a specialist. Mumford states, "What really prepared me for my career was a negative decision: I didn't want to be a specialist."[355] It is apparent from his writings that, by "specialist," Mumford means to say a scholar who is limited to a specific area of interest, and therefore incapable of understanding the full measure of human life.[356] Allen Davis states, "Mumford…all his life had a certain disdain for narrow, academic research and the pinched, overspecialized life of the university scholar."[357] Mumford distrusts "abstract intellectual system-making,"[358] he never completed even a Bachelor's Degree—largely because of the specialization it required—and once remarked later in life that "To be read by Ph.D.s is nothing short of a second burial."[359] When his fiancé once introduced him as a sociologist, Mumford objected, saying he was "as much an artist as the poets and playwrights who submitted their work to the Dial."[360] He continued, speaking of sociologists on the one hand and artists on the other, "…I am Ishmael in

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[354] TOM, P. 1.
[355] MWD, P. 431.
[356] Mumford states, "All too easily in our segmented and regimented society one gets ticketed as being fit for only one task; and though I have spent my life in avoiding just such pigeonholing, even now I find that it is hard to avoid that fate in other people's minds." (SFL, P. 185)
[357] Allen F. Davis, "Lewis Mumford: Man of Letters, and Urban Historian" *Journal of Urban History* Vol. 19 Is. 4 (August 1993): P. 123.
[358] William T. Cotton, "The Eutopitect: Lewis Mumford as a Reluctant Utopian" *Utopian Studies* Vol. 8 Is. 1 (1997): P. 3.
[359] Davis, P. 123.
[360] This is Cotton's description (P.2) of events that are recorded in a letter to his fiancé, Sophie Wittenberg (4 August, 1921), published in *Works and Days*, P. 86.

both camps, and am about as popular a corpse that has lain too long in no man's land between the trenches."[361]

With his Generalist-as-opposed-to-Specialist vocation, it is not surprising to know that many find Mumford's method difficult to categorize.[362] In fact, as Guy Beckwith states, "Mumford has on occasion been accused of applying *no rigorous method at all*, but instead adducing intuitions and insights in an impressionistic fashion, long on movement and dynamism, short on depth."[363] However, Beckwith counters, "But many of Mumford's closest readers find in his work a genuine unity-in-diversity,"[364] and find that he "provides a classic example of rigorous and effective interdisciplinary thought."[365]

To support Beckwith's point that Mumford is more than simply a "dilettante" or a "cumulative polymath," and that he indeed has a specific method supporting his work, Beckwith points to a fundamental dialectic underpinning and connecting the whole of Mumford's academic contributions: namely, the dialectic of the "organic and the mechanical."[366] Consistent with the instrumentalist view that technology in and of itself has no value except the ends for which the agent creates and utilizes it, Mumford sees the primary problem with the technological society, not in terms of more technology being present, but rather the kind of thought employed by the people directing it and the kinds of ends towards which it is directed. Mumford

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[361] MWD, P. 86.
[362] Davis (P. 124) states, "It is a task both difficult and pleasurable, for Mumford is always a joy to read but just as difficult to categorize." However, in his essay, "City as Community: The Life and Vision of Lewis Mumford" (*Quest* Vol. 4 Is. 1, January 2001. P. 1), Robert Wojtowicz argues that the difficulty of categorizing Mumford is intentional: "Part of the difficulty in evaluating Mumford lies in his own refusal to be pigeonholed intellectually. In a used bookstore, for example, one might as easily find his books shelved in the social sciences as in the arts or humanities."
[363] Guy V. Beckwith, "The Generalist and the Disciplines: The Case of Lewis Mumford," *Issues in Integrative Studies* No. 14 (1996): P. 8. Emphasis added.
[364] Ibid., P. 2.
[365] Ibid., P. 1.
[366] Ibid., P. 2.

consistently advocates for an "organic balance" in the ends towards which technology is directed, as opposed to the cold, regimented, "mechanical" thought processes which so often prevail.[367] In his essay, "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," Leo Marx captures the centrality of this dialectic in Mumford's writing when he states the following:

> The opposition between the organic and the mechanical…dominates Mumford's thinking. Allusions to this all encompassing conflict…recur at crucial junctures of his writing, and they provide it with a telling coherence and persuasiveness.[368]

While his vocation as an academic is defined by his goals to be a generalist, the dialectic between the organic and mechanical shapes the contours of his method more than any other feature in his writing.

Furthermore, the dialectic Mumford creates between organic and mechanical is, by his own admission, Platonic.[369] Indeed, upon a close reading, one discovers that Mumford's Platonism is *the* operative feature of his work in more ways than simply his dialectical style of writing.[370] While this chapter will later turn to examine this dialectic more closely, it is important to note that a very clear Platonic dialectic is always at work, supporting and guiding his goals as a self-described generalist.

2. Mumford the Romantic Humanist

Closely linked to his "generalist" duties to rise above what he sees as the regimented, myopic analyses of so many of his contemporaries, Mumford's work is motivated by a strong

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[367] From his first major work to his last, Mumford maintained the theme of the organic v. mechanical. In SOU, Mumford calls society "mechanical puppets" whose "values have not been human values" (P. 252). In POP, nearly 50 years later, Mumford contrasts a "life lived in accordance with Nature," and "the later exponents of a new life framed in conformity to the Machine."

[368] Leo Marx, "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," in, Thomas P. Hughes and Agatha C. Hughes (ed.), *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual* (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1990), P. 168.

[369] In his autobiography, Mumford continuously either compares his writing to, or openly envies the acumen of Plato's dialectical style (MWD, P. 116, 182, 357).

[370] Cotton (*Eutopitect*, P. 4) makes explicit what Mumford had only implied: the whole of Mumford's critical agent hangs upon the affirmation of a Platonic epistemology. Mumford's use of "Idolum" to confer upon the agent a contrary perception of reality depends quite heavily on the assumption of an internal "world of ideas" that transcends experience, closely resembling a Platonic conception of rationalism.

optimism in humankind, which he attributes primarily to the various disciplines of the arts and humanities. In particular, Mumford's work is energized by a strong affinity for romanticism and humanism—impulses he utilizes as a unified front against the perceived horrors of modern life. This section will explore the way the two impulses come together in Mumford's work.

First, as William Cotton states, "In all his writings, Mumford is an avowed humanist. The term always had for him the *strongest positive connotations*."[371] Mumford always holds at the core of his analysis the centrality of the human being. He states, "the chief end of man is that he should grow to the fullest stature of his species,"[372] and that "Man himself…is the central fact."[373] The human being is not only the center of Mumford's world, but is the world's greatest hope, and is the greatest resource for one's own salvation. Mumford praises the proclamations of Pico della Mirandola concerning human nature, that "Thou [humans] shalt have the power, out of thy soul and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine," responding thus: "There have been many attempts during the past century to describe man's peculiar nature, but I am not sure that a better characterization has yet been made than that of the Renascence [sic] humanist, Pico della Mirandola…That choice recurs at every stage in man's development."[374] It is from this very optimistic and anthropocentric vision of humanism that Mumford first turns to address the problems of the technological society.

The irony of Mumford's optimism is that he is exceedingly critical of the technological society—what most instrumentalists, as previously shown, might call humanity's crowning achievement. However, there is a simple explanation for this irony: Mumford fully embraces the spirit of romanticism, and with that "…opposed to the scientific the artist—where the artistic

[371] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[372] SOU, P. 78.
[373] MWD, P. 469.
[374] MOM, P. 47.

comprised not only the aesthetic…but also, more generally, all the subjective-affective capacities and experiences of the individual…"[375] For Mumford, there is a critical imbalance in the technological society, and he sees art, particularly the 19th century transcendentalists, as a key counterbalance to American culture's turn towards science and industry.[376] It is within his trust of the artist—not science—that Mumford finds his optimism in humanity.

While this point will be elaborated more fully in Chapter 4, it is important to note that Mumford sees art as culture's savior, and did so all throughout his life. His biographer, Donald Miller, argues that Mumford "…developed a closely related theme that runs through all his later work—the idea of the creative artist as prophet and revolutionary."[377] For Mumford, art and the artist are near-deified, akin to Mirandola's image of humankind, capable of reaching higher with each new epoch of history. Forman describes Mumford's romanticism as a "sacralization of Art" and argues, "…Mumford's ideologies…were largely typical for partisans of 'art and idealism.' …[He] took art as a mode, even the only mode, of access to the transcendent, and took the artist as the medium for communication with that realm of truth."[378] For Mumford, the artist is the hero who will rescue the human from the horrors of technological society, and essentially redeem it through the process of drawing art and the fruits of science closer together. Mumford proclaims, "It is out of the vivid patterns of the artist's ecstasy that he draws men together and gives them the vision to shape their lives and the destiny of their community anew."[379]

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[375] Paul Forman, "How Lewis Mumford Saw Science, and Art, And Himself," *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* Vol. 37 Is. 2 (March 2007): P. 276.
[376] In his book, *Lewis Mumford: Critic of Culture and Civilization* (New York, NY: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2009. P. 15), Shuxue Li states, "By establishing the Golden Day writers, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, Mumford wants to create a pantheon of American literature to maintain the balanced way of life between the subjective and the objective in a technological society."
[377] Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (New York, NY, Grove Press, 1989), P. 163.
[378] Forman, P. 278-279. Emphasis added.
[379] SOU, P. 290-291.

3. Conclusion

Taken together, Mumford's method is that of a dialectical generalist, whose optimism for human life within the technological society is found in the transcendent and holistic approach of the romantics. In particular, where all of these parts come together, is within his construct of the organic/mechanical dichotomy. Kenneth Stunkel states:

> The single big idea that dominates all of Mumford's writing is organicism, or the organic. It is the standard against which virtually all history and human activity is measured. The best thinking, he believes, supports organic values. Faulty thinking drifts into partiality and atomism. Parts are necessary and indisputable, but what really matters is the whole.[380]

The organic/mechanical dialectic is the clearest explanation of his entire method, and represents the foundation for the goals he seeks to achieve. Mumford is a generalist and not a specialist, because "what really matters is the whole," and Mumford champions the romantic critique of pure science, because "faulty thinking drifts into partiality and atomism." It is through this dialectic that Mumford believes a salvific organic synthesis through the artist will emerge.

B. Mumford's Instrumentalism

Mumford sees technology as a gadget that contains in itself no value,[381] and treats technology as something that has its own essence apart from the person creating and wielding it.[382] In his book, *Technics and Civilization*, Mumford uses the metaphor of an orchestra to describe the technological society: "For the instrument only in part determines the character of the symphony…. Looking backward on the history of modern technics, one notes that from the

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[380] Kenneth R. Stunkel, *Understanding Lewis Mumford: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Lampeter, United Kingdom, Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2004), P. 207.

[381] Mumford has another name for value-neutrality, but it functions the same way. He calls the machine or instrument "ambivalent," but the way he uses it is indistinguishable from "neutrality." In TAC (P. 283), Mumford states, "One is comforted…by the fact that the machine is ambivalent."

[382] For Mumford, the machine embodies a separate essence from the person using it or benefiting from it. In TAC (P. 323) he makes this distinction clear when he states, "From the beginning…the most durable conquests of the machine lay not in the instruments themselves, which quickly became outmoded, nor in the goods produced, which quickly were consumed, but in the modes of life made possible via the machine and in the machine…"

tenth century onward the instruments have been scraping and tuning."[383] Technology, for Mumford, is an instrument in the hands of the musician. Tuning is needed and the musicians must be synchronized, but the completed work is still in the hands of the musician.

Mumford sees the world of machines and the will of humans to be quite separate. Machines are not evil, but rather, as an instrumentalist, it is merely a question of use and the human thought wielding that use. Li states, "For Mumford, the question is not whether to have the machines or consign them to the rubbish heap. It is a question of whether to use the machine for the benefit of human life or to subordinate human life and personal freedom to the bureaucratic domination of the machine."[384] Even in his earliest and most polemical writings, it was never the factory that "damaged culture," it was the political, ethical, and conceptual systems guiding it.[385]

However, while Mumford clearly demonstrates the traits of an instrumentalist, there are two important caveats to consider that distinguish Mumford from other instrumentalists. First, (1) Mumford is by all accounts an avowed critic of the technological society in its present state, which is decidedly rare among instrumentalists. And second (2), Mumford's optimism, while unquestionably present through most of his life, appears to waver at times, especially later in his career. Ultimately, this section introducing Mumford will conclude by showing how both of these unique qualities are what make him a particularly suitable fit for the goals of this thesis.

1. Mumford the Critic

What sets Mumford apart from other instrumentalists is that he is *critical* of the technological society. Mumford sees human beings within the technological society exercising a

[383] TAC, P. 434.
[384] Li, P. 51.
[385] Li, P. 5.

certain type of thinking that leads to their acquiescence towards the bidding of a valueless social megastructure he calls, "The Megamachine."[386] Like an instrumentalist—as well as a good humanist—Mumford understands the human to have the will and the capacity to master and direct the Megamachine,[387] but unlike other instrumentalists, Mumford believes it is necessary to level a career-long critique against the technological society to achieve it.[388]

Additionally, unlike other instrumentalists, Mumford sees the aggregate of the technological society—functioning itself as if it were a machine—to be particularly deleterious to the conditions of the human. Reflecting upon what he calls the "paleotechnic phase" of the technological society (1700-1900 in industrial nations), Mumford describes its inhabitants' lives as such: "The operations themselves were repetitive and monotonous; the environment was sordid; the life that was lived…was empty and barbarous to the last degree."[389] For Mumford, the Megamachine that humans created is guided towards objectionable ends. Like an instrumentalist, Mumford does not object to the gadgets themselves, but rather the ends towards which the technical-social apparatus is directed.[390] However, his insistence upon the inherent

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[386] While an expanded definition for the Megamachine will be provided in Chapter 5, Mumford provides a more appropriate usage of the term in MWD (P. 472), that is better suited to the intentions of this section. He states, "By now a large sector of the population of the planet feels uneasy, deprived and neglected—indeed cut off from 'reality'—unless it is securely attached to some part of the megamachine: to an assembly line, a conveyor belt, a motor car, a radio or a television station, a computer, or a space capsule." Here Mumford describes technology in the aggregate and he describes the human's apparent dependence upon or acquiescence towards it, as if it is a social structure within which the human is designed to fit.

[387] In his book, *The Human Prospect* (London, UK,: Secker & Warburg, 1956. P. 311), Mumford makes clear that the human has it within one's power to conquer the forces of the machine; he states, "With the knowledge man now possesses, he may control the knowledge that threatens to choke him; with the power he now commands he may control the power that would wipe him out; with the values he has created, he may replace a routine of life based upon a denial of values."

[388] Mumford claims "mastery" of the machine as the prime objective of his magnum opus, Technics and Civilization, by way of distinguishing and defining "the specific properties of a technics directed towards the service of life." (P. 7)

[389] TAC, P. 153-154.

[390] Mumford continually argues that the end goal of technology should be driven towards the benefit of what he called the "whole man." In COM (P. 336), Mumford states, "…the whole man [is] the necessary goal of a fully humane system of production…the whole man must rest upon a theory of production which itself takes into consideration the underlying needs of the human personality." In SOU (P. 254-255), Mumford calls for an end to "purely temporal ends" that regard "efficiency or organization…the very touchstone of social improvement."

problems of these cumulative ends indeed makes him unique from the bevy of instrumentalists that populate today's technical discourse.

2. Mumford the Gloomy Optimist

The second feature that sets Mumford apart from a general trend in instrumental theory is that Mumford's optimism tends to waver at the end of his career. While he changed very little, if at all, in his overall philosophical structure, and while he seems to consistently maintain his articulation of human nature and self throughout his life, Mumford struggles to show any positive signs for the future, and according to Miller, he tends to reflect "a growing disenchantment with modern life and a gathering pessimism…about the possibilities of human renewal."[391]

It is generally agreed that Mumford begins to turn pessimistic following World War II, though his pessimism does not hit its peak until the completion of his final major works, *The Myth of the Machine*, and *The Pentagon of Power*.[392] There are many notable reasons given for this gradual turn towards pessimism. The first is personal, as Mumford suffered the death of his son—who was a soldier in World War II—once even admitting in a letter that he had demonstrated "a heavy load of depression which might reach suicidal depths"[393] due to the lasting anguish over his loss. The second reason is, in the words of Miller, "The invention and deployment of the atomic bomb,"[394] for which, according to Mumford, "…showed me Hitler

[391] Miller, P. 300.
[392] Miller (*Lewis Mumford Reader*), Michael Zuckerman ("Faith, Hope, Not Much Charity: The Optimistic Epistemology of Lewis Mumford" in *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, P. 362), and Frank G. Novak (*The Autobiographical Writings of Lewis Mumford: A Study in Literary Audacity*, USA, University of Hawaii Press/Biographical Research Center, 1988, P. 53) argue that Mumford begins his "different drift" (Zuckerman) or "pessimism" (Miller) immediately after WWII, and such pessimism reaches its climax in MOM and POP.
[393] MWD, P. 430.
[394] Miller, *The Lewis Mumford Reader*, P. 300.

had…conquered the minds of the most democratic governments."[395] The third reason often given to explain Mumford's turn towards pessimism is his growing impatience with the scientific community to do anything about the problems of the technological society. Everett Mendelsohn states, "He expressed a disappointment at being let down or abandoned by science and scientists. He expected more…."[396]

While the varied explanations that scholars give for this pessimistic turn may very well contribute to Mumford's change later in his career, it is still nonetheless a curious shift, given his overall *unchanged* epistemology and his otherwise optimistic view of human nature.[397] Indeed, it appears that the shift from his still-optimistic outlook in *Technics and Civilization* (1934) to his overt pessimism in *The Myth of the Machine* (1963) is less to do with a change in sentiments—be it the loss of his son, the existential threat of the atomic bomb, or his impatience with the scientific community—but rather a necessary outgrowth from his thought.[398] In his essay, "Faith, Hope, Not Much Charity," Michael Zuckerman provides a very telling description of the end to this process for Mumford—one which shall be explored in more detail later—that despite his fidelity to his earliest convictions and constructions regarding the power of human nature within the technological society, *"he disdains the conclusions to which his intellect impels him."*[399] In other words, it is Mumford's intellect that guides him to his later pessimistic

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[395] Quoted from a letter Mumford wrote to Buno Zevi, 12 October, 1973, in Miller, *The Lewis Mumford Reader*, P. 300-301.
[396] Everett Mendelsohn, "Prophet of Our Discontent: Lewis Mumford Confronts the Bomb," in *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, P. 342.
[397] In his essay, "Faith, Hope, Not Much Charity," Zuckerman argues that Mumford's epistemology remains unchanged throughout his career, and with it, his "latent" optimism for the human project. Zuckerman states, "In just such tortured turns, Mumford keeps faith with his understanding of the contingency of history. At the same time…he keeps faith with himself…Mumford does not doubt that ours is a culture drifting ever further from human fullness…Yet almost always, he refuses to give in." (*Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, P. 376)
[398] Zuckerman states, "*The Myth of the Machine* scouts the far frontiers even as it goes over old ground. It is his most searching reconnaissance of contemporary culture and consciousness, yet it returns to his earliest intellectual attachments." (Ibid., P. 376)
[399] Hughes & Hughes, P. 376.

conclusions, in *opposition* to his sentiments. His optimistic articulation of human nature—and by extension, his optimism for humankind—is ultimately betrayed by his conclusions.

II: Mumford's Anthropology

As structured in the third chapter, this thesis is working from the understanding that self is one's perception of one's own stature within the cosmos, and is expressed by way of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: (A) the human's relationship to nature and/or history, (B) how one relates to and understands the external world, and (C) how these assessments manifest within the aggregate state of the human's consciousness. Respective to each section, this section will (1) trace Mumford's philosophical definition of self through these categories and (2) highlight his more fundamental differences with Niebuhr.

A. The Human's Relationship to Nature

*1. Mumford: Emerging **From** and **Over** Nature*

Mumford's view of the self as it relates to nature comes in three distinct, yet mutually reinforcing, parts: (a) the self's *attachment to* nature, (b) the self's *emergence from* nature, and (c) the self's *creativity over* nature. This section will describe each part, and how all come together to create his most central ethical axiom: (d) organic balance.

a. Attachment to Nature

For Mumford, in the beginning was nature. Drawing partially upon the ideas of Democritus, Mumford states, "The world…is a random mixture of atoms: chance created solid aggregations out of endless atomic collisions, and man's nature was formed, essentially, by extraneous forces."[400] Mumford sees the human as one who is completely attached to and

[400] COL, P. 25.

composed of the nature surrounding him or her. There is no escaping nature; the human *is* nature.

However, parting with Democritus, the relationship between the human and nature is anything but static. Mumford argues that nature is constantly in flux and follows a very specific trajectory to which all organisms must inevitably submit. Indeed, Mumford even goes so far as to elevate the natural processes that surround and run through human nature to the level of fate or providence. Mumford states, "First of all, all organisms follow a *life-plan* peculiar to their species. Until death, the most radical changes that take place within an organism proceed in a *directed* orderly sequence, determined partly by its own nature."[401] Mumford sees the human as a vessel, composed *of* and guided *by* nature simultaneously. He states, "Life is directional in tendency, goal-seeking, end-achieving, in short, *purposive*."[402] He continues, "Nature's induction to every organism…is: 'Be yourself. Fulfill yourself! Follow your destiny!'"[403] Mumford even extends this "*life-plan*" into what he calls, "the fundamental morality of nature."[404]

b. Emergence from Nature

In Mumford's view, the second part of all organism's relationship to nature is a certain "emergent" quality. Effectively, Mumford recognizes a "higher state" for all creatures—what he describes as the organism's ability to "regulate the processes outside of it."[405] For Mumford, the organism itself is in constant flux as it remains within a perpetual state of emergence out from and alongside nature, and yet to survive it adapts internally to the rhythms of its environment just

[401] Ibid, P. 28. Emphasis added.
[402] Ibid., P. 31. Emphasis added.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid., P. 32.
[405] Ibid., P. 28.

enough to enjoy some measure of control over the elements of nature within and surrounding the organism. Mumford states, "Continuity and emergence greet one everywhere. The shape of any living thing depends not merely upon outside pressure but upon inner, self-maintaining, self-restoring, and self-fulfilling processes."[406] This higher state of the organism, by Mumford's admission, is "paradoxical," in that nature develops for the organism a means by which the organism can control nature to varying degrees.[407] Mumford states, "The organism enregisters and remembers: it remembers and reacts: it reacts and it anticipates: yes, it proposes and projects."[408]

c. Human Creativity over Nature

As stated, Mumford maintains that *attachment* and *emergence* are universal among all living things—everything alive is in constant contact with its biological and physical environment and everything alive attempts to grow in conformity with and (paradoxically) *over* nature in order to survive. However, Mumford maintains that where human nature is separate from other organisms is decidedly in the realm of creativity, and it is by way of two developments that were unique to human nature: the human's ability to create symbols and language, and the human's ability to dream.[409] These extra developments stretched human nature beyond the simple memory-reaction-anticipation-projection sequence shared by other organisms, and created the possibility for "mindedness"—a complex inner life that granted the human a limitless world of ideas that could challenge or enhance the pre-existing ordering processes of nature, and permitted the human to do more than survive, but also to thrive and

[406] Ibid., P. 29.
[407] COL, P. 26.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid., P. 56

enjoy life. Mumford states, "Given this original organic equipment, man 'minded' more of his environment than any other animal, and so has become the dominant species on the planet."[410]

Regarding the first aspect of human creativity, Mumford maintains that the ability to create symbols and language is the initial sign of the human's uniqueness.[411] The development of symbols and language had to precede any tool or gadget the human could ever devise. The human is more than Homo Faber[412]—the tool making animal; the human is the *symbol*-making animal, the *dreaming* animal, the *ritualistic* animal.[413] Mumford states, "The invention and perfection of these instruments—rituals, symbols, words, images, standard modes of behavior (mores)—was, I hope to establish, the principal occupation of early man, more necessary to survival than tool-making, and far more essential to his later development."[414] In other words, preceding all other accomplishments related to work or survival, the human developed a symbolic universe of communication and action. It is this creative element that allowed for the human to do more than simply emerge from and over nature, but to also be its creator.

For Mumford, the second distinguishing development that is central to the human's capacity for creativity is the uniquely human and seemingly superfluous adaptation he calls "dream life."[415] Mumford holds that through dreaming, "man became conscious of a haunting super-natural environment," yet it "opened man's eyes to new possibilities in his waking life."[416] For Mumford, dreaming opened the human to establishing a bifurcation in reality: an "inner and outer world;" the latter informed the human's immediate perspective on reality, the former invited the human to imagine the endless possibilities for reality. Mumford claims that the

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[410] MOM, P. 25.
[411] Ibid., P. 24.
[412] COL, P. 40.
[413] Ibid., P. 40.
[414] MOM, P. 51.
[415] COL, P. 34-35.
[416] MOM, P. 51.

human is "the only creature who ever had the intuition that there is more in nature than meets the eye," and that "opening up his specific human capacities, the unknown, indeed, the unknowable, has proved an even greater stimulus than the known…"[417] While the human is like all organisms in that he or she is a continuation *of* nature and emerges *from* nature, the human goes beyond other organisms in that he or she considers what is not in nature; the human can draw upon imagination—the inner world of ideas that reveal what is possible, and even that which is impossible.

Regardless of how much or how little the dream life and the human's ability to create symbols truly distinguishes the human from other organisms, Mumford sees the culmination of these traits as the beginning of human creativity—or what he calls "purposeful novelty as distinguished from randomness."[418] The human has the ability to draw from the infinite possibilities of the imagination and create what was not previously there, to live for more than mere survival, and to belong to something more than a species, but a family, a tribe, and a culture.[419]

d. Organic Balance

Taken together—the human's necessary attachment *to* nature, the process of emerging *from* nature, and the human's creativity *over* nature by way of language and an inner-world of ideas—these truths comprise for Mumford the key triumvirate of organic living; in other words, these are the key features to living within the purpose or "life-plan" provided in nature. The human must not neglect one's biological self, the human must grow, adapt, evolve, and transform in accordance to that natural self, and the human must incorporate the two into one's

[417] TOM, P. 13.
[418] MOM, P. 39.
[419] TOM, P. 13.

creative inner-world of ideas. The central axiom of organic living is therefore to maintain *balance* between the three.[420]

It is vital to note that much of Mumford's analysis of the organic self rests upon the concepts of balance and imbalance. Summarizing Mumford, Duane Miller states, "Man can only survive in a meaningful and creative way if he recognizes and respects all parts of his nature.[421] For Mumford, a deep self-awareness is needed to live organically, and one must become conscious of the *whole* self in a balanced way to sustain and create the meaningful life provided and directed by nature. Inversely, the absence of balance for Mumford is marked by the occasion of death; radical imbalance is the very end of life.[422] These natural trajectories towards organic and balanced life on the one hand, and mechanical and imbalanced death on the other, will be more pronounced the further he enters into his analysis of the technological society.[423]

It is also important to note that Mumford's balanced organic self is not static, but is dynamic, constantly transcending and reinventing itself. One of the key components of balance is the recognition that human nature is constantly emerging from nature. It is either growing, evolving, and adapting—thus fairly balancing its trait of emergence—or it is dying. For Mumford, this takes place primarily for the human in the collaborative pursuits of both the human's inner-world of ideas and the human's external physical world. Mumford states, "Organic growth and repair have their counterpart in the personality in the process of renewal: a continued making over of ideas and attitudes, of sentiments and plans, so that the person will

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[420] COL, P. 32.
[421] Duane Russell Miller, *The Effect of Technology Upon Humanization in the Thought of Lewis Mumford and Jacques Ellul*, Boston University dissertation, 1969. P. 65-66.
[422] COL, P. 31.
[423] In his article, "The road to Necropolis: technics and death in the philosophy of Lewis Mumford" (*History of the Human Sciences* Vol. 16 Is. 4, November, 2003. P. 4), Gregory Morgan Swer notes the pattern of life versus death dichotomy throughout Mumford's work: "Thus Mumford presents us with a variety of technological Manicheeism [sic] with the forces of life and death in permanent conflict both internally, within the individual and social psyche, and externally, within our technological forms."

overcome the animal tendency to repetition, fixation, automatism."[424] As the inner-world develops in conjunction with the human's external world of attachment and emergence from nature, the human's direction is more in-line with one's natural life-plan. However, as Mumford mentions, there is a tendency to lose one's true humanity through imbalance, reverting to lower forms of nature: i.e. animals and automatons.

Ultimately, Mumford maintains that human nature can change, and has changed radically throughout human history. Indeed, both his critique of the technological society, and his salvation plan from the technological society are heavily dependent upon changing the very nature of humanity. In his book, *The Conduct of Life*, Mumford opens the work with a warning: "Perhaps never before have the peoples of the world been so close to losing *the very core* of their humanity."[425] Furthermore, in *The Human Prospect*, Mumford outlines the gradual development of the "new person;" he states:

> One phase of civilization does not replace another as a unity, in the way that a guard assigned to sentry duty takes over its post. For a while they mingle confusedly, until a moment comes when one realizes that the entire scene has changed and all the actors are different. So with internal change that will produce the new person.[426]

In both of these examples, what remains consistent is his very clear position that the human is one who "emerges from the matrix"[427] of various external and internal developments, and that characteristic of change is inherent to the human's very nature, and is within the human's control in collaboration with nature. Indeed, as expressed in the very first example, the human is capable of losing the core of one's humanity. The concern that remains central for Mumford is not whether human nature evolves, but what is the thing into which humanity is evolving?

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[424] COL, P. 33.
[425] COL, P. 3. Emphasis added.
[426] Lewis Mumford, *The Human Prospect* (London, UK, Secker & Warburg, 1956), P. 306.
[427] In COL (P. 33),"Emerges from the matrix" is a description of human nature he uses in the context of humans emerging within and alongside communal life and nature.

2. Mumford and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding Humans and Nature

a. Nature as Human's Home or the Homelessness of the Human

While Mumford begins his analysis of human nature within and emerging from the processes of nature itself, Niebuhr begins simply with the acknowledgement that humans have the capacity for self-awareness, and upon this single observation, Niebuhr assesses that the human is by some measure distinct from nature, yet still somewhat tethered to it. This differentiation in starting point is noteworthy in that Niebuhr views the human as one who is, by nature, in a state of homelessness,[428] whereas Mumford's human clearly finds one's home in nature. Even Mumford's view of human creativity is still very much working in confluence with nature, and is seemingly designed to work in such a way in accordance to nature's "life-plan."

b. Benevolence or Ambiguity of Nature

Related to the first difference, Mumford assumes a benevolent—nearly divine—quality about nature, whereas Niebuhr sees nature as—*for the most part*—ambiguous and amoral. While Niebuhr admits to at least some vague traces of morality in Natural Law,[429] nature alone contains no dimension high enough to unify itself without human interpretation, carrying the human's "perennial corruptions of interests and passion" with it.[430] In perhaps his clearest statement about the morality of nature, Niebuhr states, "But there is, after all, little freedom or purpose in the evolutionary process—in short, little morality; so that if we can find God only as

[428] NDHN, P. 14.
[429] In CLCD (P. 72), Niebuhr argues that there is at least some value in Natural-law theory, but it is at its best when it remains generic, and it becomes more unhelpful, potentially dangerous, when its laws become calcified into specific applications. In this same section, Niebuhr gives the feudalistic medieval Catholic Church as an example.
[430] CLCD, P. 70.

he is revealed in nature we have no moral God."[431] The implication of this statement is clear: all that comes from nature is seemingly amoral, including a naturally perceived god.[432]

c. Balance or Tension within Human Nature

The third major difference in how Mumford and Niebuhr articulate the inherent relationship between the human and nature springs first from a point of relative agreement: there is a "higher state" about the human which makes him or her unique among the animals, and that "higher state" exists alongside the human's more animalistic nature. While Mumford calls such a state "creativity," the human's "inner world," or what will be discussed shortly, the human's "idolum,"[433] Niebuhr calls this status one which is "transcendent," "spirit," or just simply the human's "uniqueness."[434] In either case, both Mumford and Niebuhr recognize the uniqueness of humanity as existing, at least partially, within its higher abilities to consider itself, and to varying degrees control nature and interpret history.

Where Mumford and Niebuhr differ on this point is how each perceive the relationship between the "higher self" and the "lower," more animalistic self. Mumford renders all parts of the human—both the human's animalistic impulses *and* creativity—as natural, and therefore good. Because of this, Mumford articulates the human's highest virtue as that of balance: each natural trait cultivated and acknowledged equally in order to conform more fully with the "life-path" of nature—a virtue he calls "organicism." Mumford describes this balanced person, "The Organic Person," as one who maintains "…a balanced personality: not the specialist but the whole man. Such a personality must be in dynamic interaction with every part of his

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[431] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Our Secularized Civilization," *Christian Century Vol 43 (22 April, 1926), P. 508.*
[432] It was previously mentioned that Mumford assigns divine-like qualities to nature (provision, purpose, morality, life-plan directionality), but he also, albeit rarely, articulates quite a literal god—though existing in his language as just that: language used to proximate a certain push of nature towards future ends. See: COL, P. 71. It is precisely this kind of god for which Niebuhr articulates his critique concerning the 'God only as he is revealed in nature."
[433] SOU, P. 13.
[434] NDHN, P. 4.

environment and every part of his heritage…the whole personality must be constantly at place, at least at ready call, at every moment of its existence…."[435] To strive towards the organic, Mumford's human must hold all parts of the self wholly, equally, and simultaneously. If nature is home, the path of organic balance is how one arrives and exists most optimally within that home.

In contrast to Mumford, while Niebuhr firmly acknowledges similarly apparent divisions in human nature, "balance" is perhaps the last word Niebuhr would use to describe the human situation. Rather, Niebuhr sees the human being, in its very composition, as one who exists in a perpetual state of tension, predisposed to angst. As explored in the third chapter, Niebuhr views human nature as that which is in conflict with itself. Niebuhr states, "Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited."[436] Niebuhr sees this tension between creatureliness and transcendence, nature and spirit, as an "inevitable concomitant" of anxiety.[437] For Niebuhr, the human was never in a state of complete balance, but rather has always been conditioned for imbalance.

d. Entirely Emerging Human or Timelessly Conditioned Human

The final difference between Mumford and Niebuhr regarding each scholar's view of the self within nature and history is that while Mumford sees the human being as a constantly changing, morphing, and evolving creature, Niebuhr is quick to highlight the inner-

[435] COM, P. 419-420.
[436] NDHN, P. 178-179.
[437] Ibid., P. 182.

contradictions about humans that will never be resolved or fade into history.[438] Niebuhr calls the tensions within human nature the "perennial human predicament,"[439] arguing that the human can never fully resolve the problems of self, *thus contrasting Mumford's highest objective with Niebuhr's most central premise.* Essentially, Niebuhr's human is one who embodies a condition that never changes, while Mumford's human remains in constant flux.

B. Humans Relating to and Understanding the World

1. Mumford: Inner Balance

Mumford's human emerges from nature in a balanced state and is tasked with maintaining that balance through the constant changes of the self and one's external environment. While constant progress and adaptation is a necessity for all living organisms, Mumford maintains that the two variables the human must continually cultivate symmetrically are the inner-world of ideas on the one hand, and the external—natural and social—world on the other. It is from this dualistic approach that Mumford will place together two theorists to articulate how the human relates to and understands one's environment: (a) Plato and (b) Carl Jung.[440] This section will describe his use of each thinker and conclude with a broad statement on how he integrates both into his thought.

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[438] Niebuhr argues for a "Biblical-Augustinian" view of historical recurrence, where the the histories of peoples and nations repeat themselves in an inevitable cycle of pride and self-destruction. Niebuhr states, "[Civilizations] perish at their own hands; and the instrument of their destruction is the pride by which they make some ephemeral technique, structure or instrument of history into a false absolute. This conception of pride as the cause of a civilization's destruction is a Biblical-Augustinian addition to the classical idea of historical recurrence." (FAH, P. 109)

[439] Ibid., P. 34.

[440] Swer rightly points out, "…Mumford was notoriously selective in acknowledging and referencing his sources" (The road to Necroopolis, P. 4), therefore scholars have taken great liberties to centralize any number of influences that could or could not be central to Mumford.

a. Modified Platonism and the Idolum

It was previously mentioned that Mumford models his dialogical method following Plato, but Plato's influence upon Mumford in no way ends with methodology. While his position concerning the self is greatly colored in with Jung and—to a lesser extent—Sigmund Freud, Mumford's most fundamental articulation of how the human relates to and understands nature is very much Platonic.[441] In fact, it is in the midst of his critique of Plato that Mumford discovers where his work should fit; Mumford criticizes Plato for seeking "only the salvation of enlightened individuals," and for having "nothing to offer the mass of men, and no vision of the general renewal of society."[442] But "Above all," Mumford continues, "we need an ideology so profoundly organic that it will be capable of bringing together the severed halves of modern man…."[443] To put it in Platonic terms, Mumford desires a marriage and balance of Form and Receptacle—soul and body—in order to unify the human being. In Niebuhrian terms, Mumford seeks to resolve the contradictions of the human predicament.

The inner-world of ideas—forged in the early experiences of dreams and the human's ability to create symbols—establishes for Mumford a duality of worlds for which the human experiences simultaneously. Mumford describes the inner-world as such:

> What makes human history such a…fascinating story is that man lives in two worlds—the world within and the world without—and the world within men's heads has undergone transformations which have disintegrated material things with the power and rapidity of radium. I shall take the liberty of calling this inner world our idolum (ido'lum) or world of ideas. The word 'ideas' is not used here precisely in the

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[441] Speaking of his own immersion into the thought of Plato, (SFL, P. 142) Mumford himself claims that in his earliest forays into the field of philosophy, "Plato himself took possession of me," and continued to proclaim, "anyone who would seek to appraise…my intellectual outlook would go widely astray if he did not also take account of my lifelong intercourse with…Plato." Furthermore, Aligning Mumford's epistemology with Plato's is a common observation throughout scholarship. Cotton directly links Mumford's use of "idolum" and inner-world of ideas with Plato's use of forms (P. 4). Zuckerman argues that while Plato was a major influence his whole career, he became more prominent to Mumford's thought in his latter years. In his essay (Hughes & Hughes, P. 363), "Tragedy, Responsibility, and the American Intellectual, 1925-1950" (Hughes & Hughes, P. 326), Richard Wightman Fox called his Platonic vision of the world "Mumford's Platonic conception."
[442] COL, P. 22.
[443] Ibid., P. 22-23.

> ordinary sense. I use it rather to stand for…what the theologians would perhaps call the spiritual world….[444]

For Mumford, the idolum functions as a "spiritual" world, full of subjective observation, containing both fantasies and rationalizations, alike, and his Platonism is most clearly on display as he articulates internally constructed values as the prime mover of human history.

Moreover, it is the *purposes* for which Mumford categorizes the human in this way that makes him especially Platonic. Mumford claims that the inner-world of ideas births a "pseudo-environment" that has the ability to instruct the human on how best to change the external world; he argues that utilizing the idolum is like consulting "…a surveyor and an architect and a mason and proceed to build a house which meets our essential needs…."[445] For Mumford, it is from the inner world of ideas—the idolum—that a concept of utopia[446] is born and is capable of providing for humanity a blueprint to create an environment that forms the external world of nature and society in a way that can allow for the human to achieve its highest values. In fact, this ideation—separating the internal and external, formulating conceptions of utopia from the idolum—derives its influence specifically, by his own admission, from Plato's *Republic*.[447]

Additionally, there is a strong correlation between Plato's use of knowledge-as-mastery and that of Mumford. Mumford saw the idolum as a source of power over nature that could achieve near—if not complete—perfection within and alongside nature. He states, "What man still finds within him only at rare moments he may yet project and establish in the world outside: the beginning if not the completion of the Kingdom of Heaven."[448] While Plato rejects the idea

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[444] SOU, P. 13.
[445] SOU, P. 15.
[446] In a letter to his mentor, Patrick Geddes (29 March, 1922), Mumford defines the utopia as follows: "…a Utopia which is, so to say, the pure form of [a culture's] actual institutions, and which may therefore be abstracted from them and examined by themselves." (MWD, P. 104)
[447] In SOU, Mumford pays special attention to Plato's *Republic*, devoting several chapters exclusively to it, and constantly refers to the work throughout.
[448] COL, P. 91.

that any perfection could be found in the natural world, Plato nonetheless, particularly in his *Republic*, ascribes to a view of rationalism that is capable of transferring truths from the inner-world of ideas to the outer-world, manifesting in more true and just power.[449] It is in this way that Mumford equates knowledge with mastery. While Mumford's understanding of knowledge differs from that of pure science, Mumford's inner-world of ideas, what he articulates as "organic balance," is the key to correctly guiding nature, as opposed to being a slave to it.[450]

While Plato's influence appears to be the driving force behind his assessment of how the human relates to and understands the natural world, there is one major problem in utilizing Plato completely: Mumford also sees the natural world as essentially good—indeed, the *source* of knowledge and the *goal* (life-path) of human life. This position is, of course, directly in opposition to Plato's metaphysical view, as Plato regards nature as temporal and evil, and the soul and mind as eternal and good.[451] It is precisely this dualism of the natural and rational—body and soul—that establishes Plato's dialectic. Therefore, it stands that Mumford must find a source within nature, within the organic world, that has the effect of a transcending nature. In other words, in order for Mumford's Platonic and dualistic categories to find a home, he must conjure a spirit or soul from the material world, so to speak. For this, Mumford turns to the unconscious depths of Carl Jung and psychoanalysis.[452]

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[449] In *Republic* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1992. P. 152-156), Plato makes the argument that philosophers, or those rulers who study philosophy, are superior to those who love opinions. Here he is making the argument that those who rule should be those who "embrace the things that knowledge is set over" (P. 156). The inner-world of ideas is in some ways linked to the mastery of nature.

[450] In TAC (P. 7), Mumford states the relationship between understanding and mastery in the following way: "The study of the rest and development of modern technics is a basis for understanding and strengthening this contemporary transvaluation: and the transvaluation of the machine is the next move, perhaps, toward its mastery." According to Paul Costello, Mumford here is channeling Nietzche's understanding of "transvaluation" as used in *Anti-Christ*, where Nietzsche argues that Christianity has inverted values to mean the opposite of their appearance in nature (H.L. Mencken, trans., New York, NY: Knopf Inc., 1918. Ch. 61). See: Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993. P. 175).

[451] See Plato's *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*

[452] In his essay, "Matter and psyche" (*History of the Human Sciences* Vol 19 No 3, 2006: P. 41), Adam Green describes Mumford's rejection of pure materialism as a part of his naturalism in this way: "In dismissing the ideal

b. Jung and Psychoanalysis

While it has been argued that Freud has a much greater impact upon Mumford's thought,[453] the overwhelming consensus is that Jung is his preferred resource.[454] Regardless, Mumford uses both Freud and Jung as a dialectic of sorts to synthesize his own construction of self. While Mumford borrows some terminology and his general structure from Freud, Mumford mostly uses him as a foil to fuse his more Jungian interests of overlaying nature with a subjective essence into a more common psychoanalytical structure. All of which, however, is to find a depth to nature that can house the Platonic categories of "inner-world" and "outer world."

Mumford begins with the Freudian tripartite psyche of id, ego, and super-ego, but alters the definition and scope of each towards a more creative, Jungian, and less determinative composition that grants freedom to the individual. Regarding the Id, Mumford sees it as more than the animalistic sex drive as Freud saw it, but rather, and additionally, the drive for "love and companionship."[455] The super-ego, for Mumford, is more than simply a set of inherited social

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faculty of humanity as epiphenomenal, Mumford believes Marx made an evaluative error. Marx also tried to marginalize the ongoing psychological agency shaping material conditions. It is these two lacunae in Marxian theory, therefore, that Mumford sought to rectify by looking towards the psychoanalytic philosophy of Carl Jung." As Green argues, psychoanalysis offers a dimension to nature that Marx's materialism does not warrant. Psychoanalysis provides space for Mumford's idolum to operate in and over nature.

[453] In his essay, "Technics and (para)praxis: the Freudian dimensions of Lewis Mumford's theories of technology" (*History of the Human Sciences* Vol 17 No 4, 2004), Swer argues that Freud had the greater influence upon Mumford's thought, over and against Jung. He makes this argument upon the basis of Mumford's continued use of the tripartite psyche—divided into id, ego, and super-ego (P. 52)—and Mumford's use of "Thanatos" or the "death drive" to describe the "profound disorientation of the whole personality, tending toward destructive aggression…" that exists within the technological society. Swer argues that Mumford "…openly admired Freud's theories and repeatedly expressed his belief in their ability to usher in a new era of human self-knowledge."

[454] Green makes the very persuasive case that Mumford is almost exclusively Jungian in his use of psychoanalysis. While Swer rightly points out that Mumford uses the Freudian tripartite structure of mind, Green argues that his use of it is "situated between Jung and Freud," and not an exclusively Freudian construct (P. 43). Green notes Mumford's "dynamic and creative picture of mind as powerfully expressive rather than a prison of repressed materials…" clearly demonstrates Mumford's preference for Jung (P. 43). This observation bears out in Mumford's writing, as well. In COM (P. 364), Mumford calls Freud's view of the subconscious and its interplay with art "weak," then subsequently praises the "heresies" of Jung, claiming they "opened the way for more vital application of this knowledge." Additionally, others have noted Jung's unmistakable influence upon Mumford; see: Charles Molesworth, "Inner and Outer: The Axiology of Lewis Mumford," in Hughes & Hughes, P. 254; Leo Marx, "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," in Hughes & Hughes, P. 178.

[455] Swer, "Technics and (para)praxis," P. 53.

constraints that repress the id, but also has the ability to "[create] wholesome, positive standards which canalize and direct the id energies…guiding the ego in directing id energies into wholesome and fulfilling directions."[456] Mumford states, "In its positive aspect, the super-ego does not merely check the self but strengthens and enhances it: as a creator of positive standards the super-ego nurtures the capacity for expression and life-fulfillment, through art, ethics, religion, science."[457] On both extremes of the human's psyche, Mumford sees the potentiality for positive interaction. The id's drive for love, sex, and companionship can be met, ideally, with the structures of a "motherly" super-ego that nurtures the id and guides it towards a more fulfilling life.[458] It is in this way that Mumford's tripartite view of self most greatly differs from that of Freud: Mumford "…rejects the Freudian notion of the necessary struggle between the id and the super-ego"[459] and proposes a goal to, in his words, "…effect a working harmony between the three operative parts of the personality, thus doing away with abrasive conflicts and disruptions."[460] Consistent with his organic view of balance, Mumford understands the self to be congruous, and not necessarily conflicted, by nature.

Furthermore, while Mumford's understanding of ego "…is taken essentially unaltered from the standard Freudian theory"[461] in that the ego acts as a mediator between the id and super-ego, Mumford's addition of the idolum grants the ego extraordinary powers of imagination, cultural critique, and freedom. Mumford's version of the ego "…decides in which directions and to what ends it should direct its id-energies…and takes into account the directions of the…super-

[456] Green, "Matter and psyche," P. 43.
[457] COM, P. 424.
[458] Ibid., P. 363.
[459] Swer, P. 56.
[460] COM, P. 424.
[461] Swer, P. 52.

ego."[462] Essentially, and in opposition to Freud's "psychological determinism,"[463] the ego "…chooses to direct its will toward the alteration of the world…."[464] For Mumford, the ego has freedom, and mediates the id and super-ego towards the pursuits of the idolum.

These embellishments of the Freudian tripartite psyche are necessary for Mumford's project to critique the technological society. As Green states, "Were Mumford to take a pessimistic view of psyche in the line of Freud…there would be no potential for positive transformation or redemption from our current state because there would be no internal force of leverage."[465] To supplement Freud with these embellishments, Mumford is reliant upon the alchemy of Jung: somehow turning the unconscious world into resources of positive, artistic, even spiritual growth.[466] In other words, Jung creates a Platonic soul of sorts within which Mumford can house the idolum—the world-altering source of Mumford's Platonic aspirations.

Effectively, Jung offers to Mumford a subjective blanket to lay over the entire tripartite psyche, entering first though the subconscious, but manifesting ultimately in the freedom of the ego by way of art and culture. The human dreams, and such an action is not simply a source of observable impulses or an outgrowth of the repressed id, but rather is a "fountain of creative activity: active and fecund, with cunning powers of transposition and symbolization comparable to those of a Shakespeare."[467] Mumford attributes the discovery of an 'independent and eternal' unconscious state to Jung,[468] but builds upon it, claiming that the dream world "…transforms the experience of life into more enduring and more endurable patterns: the function of art."[469] For

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[462] Ibid., P. 56.
[463] Green, P. 43.
[464] Swer, "Technics and (para)praxis," P. 56.
[465] Green, "Matter and psyche," P. 45.
[466] Green argues that Mumford's optimism in itself is reason to suspect that he is more influenced by Jung than Freud. See: "Matter and psyche," P. 62.
[467] COM, P. 364.
[468] Green, P. 45.
[469] COM, P. 364.

Mumford, there is a direct line between the unconscious state and artistic expression; a connection he sees as vital to the freedom and critical power of the ego.

While Freud sees art and culture as little more than "…a release for otherwise uncontrollable or unrepressed energies…"[470] both Jung and Mumford see art as a source of liberation that displays "excess energies…not repressed ones.[471] Green argues, "…contrary to Freud's psychological determinism…Mumford and Jung believed [the unconscious] forces are in some ways dynamic and generative, as well as stretching far beyond the individual life…."[472] Mumford describes the origins of art in this way:

> Art arises out of man's need to create for himself, beyond any requirement for mere animal survival, a meaningful and valuable world: his need to dwell on, to intensify, and to project in more permanent forms those precious parts of his experience that would otherwise slip too quickly out of his grasp, or sink too deeply into his unconscious to be retrieved.[473]

In other words, art is the halfway point between the "independent and eternal" features of the subconscious on the one hand and the "outer world" of experience on the other, used to create a world of meaning and value. Art and symbols add depth to an otherwise material world.

The subconscious, for Mumford, becomes the "independent and eternal" foundation from where his Platonism, romanticism, and organicism emerge and converge. His Platonism finds a "hidden rationality" in nature—the idolum—to oppose whatever at present in nature constrains him, and the blueprints for a greater environment not yet fully realized. His romanticism finds in the subconscious an often-neglected artistic transcendence that can empower the human over and against the social forces that currently repress the self. And lastly, Mumford's organicism finds a new depth to self that must be balanced along with the other more apparent, seemingly *necessary* aspects of personhood.

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[470] Green, P. 43.
[471] Ibid., P. 43.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1952), P. 16.

Conclusion

Mumford's human is an extraordinarily free and powerful creature. Armed with the power of the subconscience, art, and the idolum, Mumford's human can master nature through the might of its holistic understanding. While the ego can be constrained by the limits of the world, it can also imagine a world that is very different, and then proceed to transform that world into the conformity of its idolum. In the words of Mumford, "Man internalises his external 'world' and externalises his internal 'world,'"[474] and it is "…by means of the idolum that the facts of the everyday world are brought together and assorted and sifted, and a new sort of reality is projected back again upon the external world."[475]

2. Mumford and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding the Human's Relationship to and Understanding of Nature

a. Organic Capacity to Think or Prideful Inclination to Self-Deception

For Niebuhr, there is no home for the human, and the temptation towards sin and destruction is found in the human's feeble attempts to completely assuage the incongruities of self. Niebuhr states:

> Though man has always been a problem to himself, modern man has aggravated that problem by his too simple and premature solutions. Modern man, whether idealist or naturalist, whether rationalist or romantic, is characterized by his simple certainties about himself. He has aggravated the problem of understanding himself because these certainties are either in contradiction with each other or in contradiction with the obvious facts of history…[476]

The differences between Mumford and Niebuhr on this point are key to understanding the forthcoming Niebuhrian critique of Mumford. Mumford's defense of nature and his insistence

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[474] Lewis Mumford, "An Appraisal of Lewis Mumford's 'Technics and Civilisation,'" *Daedalus* Vol 88 No 3 (1934): P. 528-529.
[475] SOU, P. 15.
[476] NDHN, P. 4.

upon the capacities of human beings to live in balance and harmony with its varying parts, and conversely, Niebuhr insistence upon the unwavering self-contradiction of human nature, place the two on different paths regarding the question of how the self relates to and understands the world. Mumford seeks resolution to the imbalances of self to properly know and master nature; Niebuhr seeks to *clarify,* or *reveal,* the contradictions of self to properly know the limitations of understanding the world and the realistic arena of human action within it.

While both thinkers consider the self in order to correct the human's understanding of the world, Niebuhr is extraordinarily weary of the human's "…constant tendency to aggravate his predicament by false efforts to escape from it."[477] Niebuhr does not see a special kind of organic reasoning that can drag the brute realities of human nature into perfect symmetry with mind and spirit; for the "mind sharpens nature's claws"[478] just as much as it draws the human into "relation to his environment and in relation to other life."[479] Niebuhr states:

> Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with the universal mind. All of his intellectual and cultural pursuits, therefore, become infected with the sin of pride.[480]

It is here one discovers Niebuhr's true concern for how a human understands and relates to the world: pride. For Niebuhr, pride is that which obscures the self, and therefore, the human's picture of the world. It is not Mumford's forthcoming mechanical view of the world in itself that creates the imbalance of self, it is the *disregard* for the *original* imbalance of self that causes the human to make a hurried attempt to capture the world; for "man's pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation."[481]

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[477] FAH, P. 34.
[478] MMIS, P. 44.
[479] Ibid., P. 26.
[480] NDHN, P. 178-179.
[481] Ibid., P. 179.

b. Balance of Mind and Correction or Clarification of Tensions and Acceptance

For Niebuhr, the answer to pride—that which obscures the realities of self and nature—is found first in the clarification of the human situation as it exists in its homeless and anxious state. It is the recognition that "No philosophy or religion can change the structure of human existence"[482] and that "The final wisdom of life requires, not the annulment of incongruity but the achievement of serenity within and above it."[483] In other words, while Mumford seeks to correct one's thinking to overcome a problematic external world, Niebuhr argues that the mere recognition that such a goal is unreachable is of the utmost value when understanding how one should relate to the world. The human can never completely alter one's environment through mere reason, therefore the serenity to accept the realities of human limitation is a necessary concomitant to real change.

In a way, Mumford's epistemology is an inversion of Niebuhr's. While both see an "imbalance" in human nature, Mumford sees the correction of that imbalance as the basis for understanding, and Niebuhr sees the acceptance and acknowledgment of that imbalance as the basis for a clearer understanding of reality. Mumford attempts to create a system that weds the mind with the organic world—rationalism with naturalism—while Niebuhr's acknowledgement of self-contradiction makes him equally suspicious of both.

C. Human Consciousness

1. Mumford: Balance of Self-Awareness

Mumford never grants his readers a concise definition of consciousness, though he speaks of it often. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to outline the way Mumford writes

[482] NDHN, P. 69.
[483] IAH, P. 63.

about consciousness in order to better compare and contrast his views with those of Niebuhr. This section will cover the way Mumford understands consciousness in three areas: (a) Consciousness of Nature, (b) Consciousness within Society, and (c) Religion and Myth as a function of Consciousness.

a. Consciousness of Nature

Like everything else in his descriptions of human nature, consciousness has an emergent and organic quality to it. Mumford states, "At some stage…man must have awakened from the complacent routines that characterize other species, escaping from the long night of instinctual groping and fumbling…to greet the faint dawn of consciousness."[484] Mumford explains consciousness as if all of nature had been working towards this one moment of human awareness for nature to finally be known, observed, measured, and interpreted.[485] Natural history plays out like a drama: from its humble origins—the "long night of instinctual groping and fumbling"—until that moment of consciousness, for which Mumford exclaims, "*Let there be light!*"[486]

It is here, in Mumford's description of consciousness, that his optimistic humanism is most clearly on display. He states, "the light of human consciousness…[is] the central fact of existence."[487] For Mumford, without human consciousness, "…the physical universe would be as empty of meaning as a handless clock: its ticking would tell nothing."[488] What is central to this interpretation of nature is that all value is projected by human consciousness, implying that *nature is inherently without value*. It is in this way that Mumford's humanism emerges: human consciousness is both the climax of natural processes and the very source of its value.

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[484] MOM, P. 29.
[485] Ibid., P. 31.
[486] Ibid., P. 30.
[487] Ibid.
[488] Ibid., P. 35.

Mumford's view of consciousness is also the place where his modified Platonic rationalism most clearly emerges. He states, "No other creature has man's capacity for creating in his own image a symbolic world that both cloudily mirrors and yet transcends his immediate environment."[489] This, of course, is the beginning of Mumford's conception of the idolum—the inner world of ideas. Humans can create conceptual imitations of the world, and use those imitations to transcend it.

One could expect at this point that Mumford might go headlong into rationalism—perhaps articulate the human as the master of nature, wielding one's idolum towards the construction of nature to one's liking. However, there is an anxious note—not completely unlike the self-contradictory human that Niebuhr so clearly articulates. Mumford sees consciousness as something that not only grants the human rational powers over nature, but ironically a humility as she or he considers themselves inside the vastness of the cosmos. Mumford states:

> Man's reason now informs him that even in his most inspired moments he is but a participating agent in a larger cosmic process he did not originate and can only in the most limited fashion control. Except through the expansion of his consciousness, his littleness and his loneliness remain real. Slowly, man has found out that, wonderful though his mind is, he must curb the egoistic elations and delusions it promotes; for his highest capacities are dependent upon the cooperation of a multitude of other forces and organisms, whose life-courses and life-needs must be respected.[490]

In a way, it appears Mumford is tapping into the Niebuhrian paradox at the center of the human situation. However, within the context of his work, it is clear that Mumford is not highlighting some connection between the human and an unwavering source of existential angst, but rather to a realization of one's connection to the "life-courses" inherent to nature. The human's "littleness and his loneliness" are indicative of the human's identity found in nature, not awkwardly estranged from it, as Niebuhr would have it. He effectively ignores the irony of the greatness of humankind as it reveals the inescapable weakness of humankind.

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[489] Ibid., P. 30.
[490] Ibid., P. 34.

b. Consciousness within Society

The most significant part of nature from which the human finds him or herself emerging is in relation to other humans.[491] For Mumford, the "littleness" and "loneliness" associated with consciousness drives the human into relationships and towards a naturally emergent formation of society. Again, using what would otherwise be considered strongly Niebuhrian language, Mumford states, "All men are, in some sense, fractional and incomplete," but unlike Niebuhr, Mumford holds that the human finds that completion within society.[492] What was lacking in isolated self-consciousness is fulfilled in the construction of human society and culture. Mumford states, "Thus human society, unlike animal societies, is an *agency of self-consciousness* and self-exploration and self-revelation."[493]

Fractured and small in isolation, yet completed within society, Mumford's sees human culture as an "…extra-organic means of changing man's nature and his environment, without leaving indelible marks on his organism or curtailing his essential flexibility and plasticity."[494] Mumford views human nature as something that has the capacity for change—and indeed, it must—and the source for that change is human culture. However, Mumford needs to maintain the power of the ego over and against society, so he states the connection between human and culture in a way that has it both ways: culture "changes man's nature" yet preserves the human's "flexibility and plasticity."

Looking forward to his coming objections to the technological society, specifically regarding his assessment of human consciousness and the community, Mumford must not drive

[491] In COL (P. 36) Mumford uses Aristotle to connect human relationships and society to nature, and connects the natural components of a balanced society with morality.
[492] COL, P. 37.
[493] Ibid., P. 37. Emphasis added
[494] Ibid., P. 38.

too hard a wedge between the two. On the one hand, Mumford needs culture to have an intractable influence upon the human in order to envisage a technological society that is actively transforming human nature to be fit like a gear into a machine. On the other hand, Mumford needs to maintain the "flexibility" and power of the human ego, so that it is still able to utilize the idolum as a means of *transforming* culture.

While Niebuhr will expose a necessary conflict between self and society,[495] and Marcuse will ultimately swell the influence of collective consciousness to the point of individual absorption,[496] Mumford remains vague on the relationship, outside of his continual prescription for "Balance: autonomy: symbiosis…."[497] It is not until Mumford analyzes the technological society that there becomes a clear point of conflict between the self and society—a conflict he interprets as "imbalance." But in its most "organic" and "balanced" state—in accordance with his more optimistic Jungian articulation of the tripartite self—Mumford sees no necessary conflict between id, ego, and super-ego, therefore no inherent conflict between self and society.[498]

c. Religion and Myth as a Necessary Function of Consciousness.

To interpret nature, the human and society are drawn to open what Mumford calls, "the fourth dimension" of consciousness: religion and myth.[499] Mumford describes the interpreting power of religion and myth in the following way: "This sphere is the realm of religion: the sphere beyond knowledge and certainty, where ultimate mystery itself adds a new dimension to

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[495] Niebuhr: "A realistic analysis of the problems of human society reveals a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperatives of a sensitive conscience." (MMIS, P. 256)
[496] See: Chapter 6.
[497] COL, P. 32.
[498] Swer argues, "Mumford…rejects the Freudian notion of the necessary struggle between the id and the super-ego. While Mumford conceded that the operations of the super-ego can be repressive, and that the id and super-ego can at times be in conflict, he argues that this situation is by no means inevitable." ("Technics and (para)praxis," P. 53)
[499] COL., P. 57.

meaning…. Against the enveloping darkness man throws the searchlight of his intelligence…. The ultimate gift of conscious life is a sense of the mystery that encompasses it."[500] Religion is a "searchlight" the human uses, projecting the interpretive light of consciousness upon the unknowable mysteries of nature. The myths of religion are subjective and holistic, unlike the atomizing and "piecemeal knowledge" of science.[501] Myth prods the deeper questions of life: "Why? Wherefore? For what purpose? Toward what end?"[502] Mumford states, "Religion seeks…not a detailed causal explanation of this or that aspect of life, but a reasonable account of the entire sum of things."[503]

For Mumford, the questions that myth and religion evoke are concomitant to the existence of consciousness. Mumford states, "Once man achieves consciousness, there is no way of casting off these [religious] questions or of evading a provisional answer, without repressing an essential quality in life itself."[504] Effectively, there is no ridding human consciousness of mythology without causing the individual's understanding of meaning, purpose, and value to suffer.

In his final analysis of human consciousness, Mumford observes that all human beings are involved in the emergent process of balancing one's external social relationships with one's inner-world of ideas, and these ideas are developed, cultivated, and replenished in-turn by one's external social relationships. Furthermore, society's interpretive instruments of myth and religion represent the nexus of the human's interpretation of one's *present* value. Self-consciousness emerges from a "matrix" of society, myth, and religion to grant ultimate meaning

[500] Ibid.
[501] Ibid., P. 59.
[502] Ibid.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.

to the self presently by granting meaning to the self historically. Without the interpretation of the "…past that he helped to make and in the future he is still making, human life would shrink in all its dimensions."[505] For Mumford, both individual and collective history are interpreted and granted meaning by social myth and matrix.[506]

2. Mumford and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding Human Consciousness

a. Consciousness as Center of Nature or Consciousness of Creation

One of the more significant areas that the two disagree is found in Niebuhr's view of consciousness as it relates to nature. "Consciousness" as Niebuhr defines it, "is a capacity for surveying the world and determining action from a governing centre."[507] From this definition of consciousness, particularly the use of the word "surveying," Niebuhr is implying a markedly passive existence in the world—a state of *contingency*—for which Niebuhr has acknowledged a likeness to Heidegger's *thrownness*.[508] While Mumford proclaims, *"the light of human consciousness…[is] the central fact of existence,"*[509] Niebuhr assumes an existence that is *contingent* upon the external world, passively observing the natural world around him or her.

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[505] Ibid., P. 27.
[506] Mumford connects nature and history together as two entities that are formed by the myth-making of the interpreter. See: COL, P. 25.
[507] NDHN, P. 13-14.
[508] In his work, *Being and Time* (trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996. P. 255), Heidegger describes *thrownness* as it relates to Da-sein (Being) in the following way: "[Da-sein] is not an unattached self-projection, but its character is determined by thrownness as a fact of the being that it is, and so determined, it has always already been delivered over to existence, and remains so constantly…. As thrown, Da-sein has been thrown *into existence*. It exists as a being that has to be as it is and can be." In other words, the condition of being thrown is one who does not control the "facticity" of the self. One emerges from existence not as one who is creating the world, but rather as one who is created in an unwavering state outside the realm of human freedom. Niebuhr incorporates Heidegger's conception of *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit)*, but translates the word as "*contingency"* (NDHN, P. 184). Effectively, the human is anchored in nature, and he or she exists as a dependent or contingent observer of nature, not as its symbolic creator. Gilkey detects an influence from Shleiermacher on this point, describing it as "…'unqualified dependence'…the consciousness of a reality and a majesty upon which all contingent existence—and so we too—depends…an ultimate source of being." (*On Niebuhr*, P. 71)
[509] MOM, P. 30.

Subsequently, the human proceeds in all one's actions—be they symbolic, interpretive, ethical, etc.—from the basis of a "governing centre."

The difference between "passively observing" and interpreting or acting from a "governing centre" is a key distinction for Niebuhr, and further highlights a significant difference between he and Mumford. Niebuhr warns that "Every philosophy of life is touched with anthropocentric tendencies" that inevitably tempt humanity into "pretending to occupy the centre of the universe."[510] However, "The obvious fact," Niebuhr argues, "is that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form."[511] Existence is *contingent* upon nature—the human is a "child of nature." However, instead of constructing a philosophy that negates that fact by way of "pretending to occupy the centre of the universe" (à la Mumford), Niebuhr removes the realm of absolute meaning from the center of human interpretation altogether. In so doing, Niebuhr finds resonance in the Christian language of *creation* to articulate his view further.

For Niebuhr, the language of creation establishes an external realm of meaning upon which the human is contingent.[512] Through the doctrine of creation, Niebuhr is able to articulate the human as one who maintains contingency with nature without sacrificing an objective—albeit limitedly comprehended—realm of meaning. Alternately stated, the language of creation allows for the human to understand the world without occupying its center. Therefore, while Mumford sees the human as one who projects all meaning and value upon nature, Niebuhr sees

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[510] NDHN, P. 3.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Niebuhr articulates creation as the conflation of three realities—nature, history, and God's providence—culminating to grant meaning to all life contingent upon it: "In this doctrine of the goodness of creation the foundation is laid for the Biblical emphasis upon the meaningfulness of human history. History is not regarded as evil or meaningless because it is involved in the flux of nature, and man is not regarded as evil because he is dependent upon a physical organism (*NDHN* P. 134)."

the human as one who receives one's meaning and value *as a part of* creation, and ultimately from its Creator.

Furthermore, the language of creation offers to Niebuhr a framework that houses the unresolved tensions of consciousness without unjustifiably annulling or abstracting them by way of some oversimplified pristine state of organic balance. Mumford discovers the paradox of consciousness and assuages its isolating and humbling effects through a seamless absorption of self into the social matrix. Niebuhr, on the other hand, uses the language of creation to establish a concept of self that can frame its perennially unresolved tensions in relation to one another, apart from—yet remaining within—the construction of social identity.

However, it is important to note, Niebuhr argues that creation in itself is not a source of interpretation.[513] While it supplies the basis for human understanding and the presumption of contingency and value, creation without *revelation* or *myth* is arbitrary, and any clear grasp of meaning would remain outside the realm of understanding for its creatures. This characterization assures for Niebuhr a distinction between the human as a passive observer who interprets nature *from* a "governing centre," over and against a human who *is the* governing center, as in the case of Mumford.

*b. Consciousness **As** and **Within** Society or Consciousness in Conflict **With** Society*

As mentioned previously, Niebuhr and Mumford greatly differ in their respective approaches to the way in which self exists in relation to society. While Mumford sees the human finding resolution in the organic community, Niebuhr argues that the tensions of consciousness

[513] Niebuhr: "The Biblical doctrine of the Creator, and the world as His creation, is itself not a doctrine of revelation, but it is basic for the doctrine of revelation." (NDHN, P. 133)

are intensified when examined in the context of social life.[514] Most notably in his work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr reveals various complexities within the relationship between self and society, but all his elaborations begin with the premise that while the human is *contingent* upon certain natural relationships for the purposes of survival, the individual is ultimately *distinct* from the collective.[515] On the one hand, Niebuhr argues that humans are "…endowed by nature with both selfish and unselfish impulses,"[516] however, on the other hand, "…the inability…to transcend their own interests sufficiently to envisage the interests of their fellow men as clearly as they do their own…"[517] creates a natural imbalance between the interests of self—which are clearly known—and the interests of the collective—which are partially veiled.

Furthermore, Niebuhr argues that the reigning minority of any social group always translates the interests of the few into the interests of the many,[518] culminating in the consolidation of power centered around those interests, making "…force an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion."[519] For Niebuhr, it is only through coercing the individual that the community can achieve relative measures of peace, as the interests of the few are inevitably incongruent with the interests of many. However, those "coercive factors" ultimately "create injustice in the process of establishing peace,"[520] for, according to Niebuhr, "…the same force

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[514] Niebuhr: "A distinction between group pride and the egotism of individuals is necessary…because the pretensions and claims of a collective or social self exceed those of the individual ego… An inevitable moral tension between individual and group morality is therefore created." (NDHN, P. 208-209)
[515] Niebuhr: "The individual is a nucleus of energy which is organically related from the very beginning with other energy, but which maintains, nevertheless, its own discreet existence." (MMIS, P. 25)
[516] MMIS, P. 25.
[517] Ibid., P. 6.
[518] In MMIS (P. 7), Niebuhr claims that historically, the reigning minority are either militaristic, economic, or religious in nature, and often some combination of the three. Niebuhr states, "While some of the pretensions of privileged classes are consciously dishonest, most of them arise from the fact that the criteria of reason, religion and culture, to which the class appeals in defense of its position in society are themselves the product of, or at least colored by, the partial experience and perspective of the class (P. 140-141)."
[519] Ibid., P. 6.
[520] Ibid., P. 16.

which guarantees peace also makes for injustice."[521] This action intensifies the tensions of social life by aggravating the moral pretensions of the individual on all sides, for "individuals believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other."[522] Every action directed by an individual towards the correction of society offends the conscience of another, as every act directed towards peace is invariably interpreted by an inferior class as an instrument of injustice, while every action directed towards the achievement of justice is invariably perceived as anarchy from the position of the ruling class.

The result for the individual is a permanent tension between self and society. Niebuhr argues that "one of the tragedies of the human spirit…[is] its inability to conform its collective life to its individual ideals."[523] He concludes: "A realistic analysis of the problems of human society reveals a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperatives of a sensitive conscience."[524] In other words, society must create for itself some semblance of stability to exist, but the cost for that peace and stability is at least some measure of injustice that impinges the rights of the individual.

Mumford believes that the balance between self and society is not only possible, but historical.[525] Niebuhr, on the other hand, once again speaks to the stubborn contradictions of self-consciousness; the individual's ability to *imagine* rational and moral solutions will forever exceed one's realistic ability to *achieve* those solutions.

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[521] Ibid., P. 6.
[522] Ibid., P. 9.
[523] Ibid., P. 9.
[524] Ibid., P. 257.
[525] One of Mumford's more central arguments against the technological society is that the human has "…detached himself as far as possible from the organic habitat (MOM, P. 3)." Throughout all of his work, Mumford constantly speaks of transforming the self and progressing in human evolution, but in keeping with his romantic proclivities, his thesis is contingent upon a former state that has, to some degree, been lost. In particular, Mumford tends to glorify the Medieval Age and the Renaissance for having "formed together a living unity (SOU, P. 285)." See also: Leo Marx, Hughes & Hughes, P. 173.

c. Religion and Myth as Ideal or Religion and Myth as Cautionary Consciousness

Regarding religion, Niebuhr and Mumford are quite similar in that both see religion as a necessary outgrowth of consciousness that emerges to assist in the interpretation of the external world. Like Mumford, Niebuhr argues that religion emerges from self-consciousness: "The essential homelessness of the human spirit is the ground of all religion; for the self which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world."[526] Self-consciousness allows the human to see him or herself from a god-like or transcendent perspective, but is compelled to make sense of that self which is far from god-like in stature. This for Niebuhr is the beginning of religion.

However, Niebuhr and Mumford disagree in how myth or religion should be used. Mumford describes the use of myth as "…the ideal content of the existing order of things…by being consciously formulated and worked out in thought…[myths] perpetuate and perfect that order."[527] For Mumford, the social myth should contain the highest values of society; it should contain the collective construction of a society's utopia, and must be projected upon nature and the community from the individual's idolum.[528] While Niebuhr acknowledges that religion and myth are commonly used this way, he argues that this is precisely how religion becomes dangerous. He argues, "Religion, declares the modern man, is consciousness of our highest social values. Nothing could be further from the truth. True religion is a profound *uneasiness* about our highest social values."[529] Mumford's use of myth is a "searchlight" that projects ultimate meaning and values upon the self and the world, while Niebuhr's use is a microscope into the vexations and anxieties of the human spirit.

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[526] NDHN, P. 14.
[527] SOU, P. 194.
[528] SOU, P. 194, 267.
[529] BTR, P. 28. Emphasis added.

III: Mumford's Easy Conscience

Ultimately, the primary way Niebuhr and Mumford differ in their respective constructions of anthropology and the self is that Niebuhr expresses what he calls the "uneasy conscience" at the center of the human situation, while Mumford maintains what Niebuhr would consider an "easy conscience." That is to say, the latter interprets the self and world from the presumption of humanity's essential goodness, while the former interprets the self and world from the position of suspicion, cognizant of the ironies and ambiguities which lie at the foundation of human understanding.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the easy conscience is indicative of a premature resolution of the contradictions of self, and occurs either when one places undue faith in the mind to resolve the problems of nature, or undue faith in nature to resolve the problems of mind. It is important to consider that Niebuhr takes the faith aspect of the easy conscience seriously; Niebuhr states, "Nature and reason are thus the two gods of modern man, and sometimes the two are one. In either case man is essentially secure because he is not seriously estranged from the realm of harmony and order."[530] By faith, the human estimates him or herself primarily from the standpoint of whichever perspective is perceived as the greater component, and so any interpretation of wrong-doing is attributed either to a defect of nature on the one hand, or an error of reason on the other, but never to self. The easy conscience is "secure" in its goodness, and this "goodness" is ultimately expressed in the human's inability to "…not only understand the reality of evil in himself but escape the error of attributing that evil to any one but himself."[531] Therefore, regarding the easy conscience, the path to salvation always remains within the human realm of achievement. Niebuhr states, "Either the rational man or the natural man is conceived

[530] NDHN, P. 95.
[531] Ibid., P. 17.

as essentially good, and it is only necessary for man either to rise from the chaos of nature to the harmony of mind or to descend from the chaos of spirit to the harmony of nature and order to be saved."[532] For the easy conscience, there is nothing *evil* in humanity that the *goodness* of humanity cannot correct.

Such is the easy conscience at the center of Mumford's construction of consciousness. "Our first duty," Mumford argues, "is to revamp our ideas and values to reorganize the human personality around its highest and most central needs."[533] Mumford proclaims this as though society's quest for its "highest and most central needs" were never among the greatest catalysts for evil throughout human history. However, Mumford insists that *his* organization towards these ends is unique, for the integration of the *rational* and *natural*—the idolum and the external world—will bring together the full picture of the organic self to produce "…balanced personalities: personalities that will be capable of drawing upon our immense stores of energy, knowledge, and wealth without being demoralized by them."[534]

Whether Mumford should be read as a rationalist who spiritualizes nature, or a naturalist with rationalist impulses, Niebuhr's characterization of the "modern man" appears all the more applicable: "Nature and reason are thus the two gods of modern man, and *sometimes the two are one.*"[535] Mumford's two gods of reason (idolum) and nature (organic balance) coalesce to obscure both the height and depth of his conception of self; he forsakes the perilous contradictions of self to establish an optimistic anchor of organic balance, and he forsakes the inherent limitations of reason to establish the revolutionizing force of the idolum. The human emerges from an ideal state, one for which the human must only assume the correct approach to

[532] Ibid., P. 25.
[533] COM, P. 415.
[534] Ibid.
[535] NDHN, P. 95.

reason and nature to return. To this point, it is almost as if Niebuhr is speaking directly to Mumford's easy conscience when he states the following: "The modern naturalist, whether romantic or rationalistic, has an easy conscience because he believes that he has not strayed very far from, and can easily return to, the innocency of nature."[536] In all his elaborations—fittingly with both rationalistic and romantic strains to his thought—Mumford carefully articulates for his human a "*home state*" of consciousness to which the human must simply return.

Furthermore, by his own premises, any disruption or imbalance of the *home state* must be attributed, by necessity, to moving away from the *home state* by way of developmental or environmental factors. In its weakest form, Mumford attributes the imbalances of self to "controlled" and "mechanically-conditioned" habits,[537] environmental misplacement,[538] or "unconscious bias,"[539] and in its strongest form, a kind of psychosis,[540] "spell,"[541] or religious adherence to a "cult of power."[542] Regardless of the external factors he may blame for upsetting the human's balanced organic environment, Mumford never articulates any problem as somehow derivative of human freedom. Even in his articulation of imbalance-as-psychosis, Mumford vaguely points to "Disturbances in [the] internal environment"[543] as the lone culprit. It is in this way that Niebuhr's critique of modern culture seems most applicable to Mumford's assessment of the self when he states, "The idea that man is sinful at the very centre of his personality, that is in his will, is universally rejected [in modern culture]."[544]

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[536] NDHN, P. 104.
[537] MOM, P. 3.
[538] Ibid.
[539] COL, P. 35.
[540] COM, P. 6-23.
[541] Ibid., P. 257.
[542] Ibid., P. 207.
[543] Ibid., P. 5.
[544] NDHN, P. 23

In contrast to Mumford, Niebuhr begins from a place of an uneasy conscience—that the human is "…tempted by the situation in which he stands."[545] The human's very state of freedom imperils the self with its temptations to resolve its homeless state through premature solutions. Niebuhr argues, "…there is no level of moral achievement upon which man can have or actually has an easy conscience," and this is the case no matter if good and evil is conceived from the position of nature, reason, or both.[546]

For Niebuhr, the human transcends nature enough so as to remove one's bondage to impulse, and so too removes the folly of attributing to nature the wrong-doing of the self. On the other hand, the human is never quite rational enough to justify one's actions purely from the standpoint of ideology or reason, for "The will-to-power uses reason, as kings use courtiers and chaplains to add grace to their enterprise."[547] This finely constructed awareness of the limitations and perplexities of human consciousness achieve for Niebuhr an uneasy conscience, a condition for which he maintains can only be revealed through the presumptions of the Christian view of self. Niebuhr states, "Christianity, therefore, issues inevitably in the religious expression of an uneasy conscience. Only within terms of the Christian faith can man not only understand the reality of the evil in himself but escape the error of attributing that evil to any one but himself.[548] For Niebuhr, the Christian view of anthropology—and by extension, the Christian view of sin—provides for the human the unique ability to understand the self as one who has the very real capacity for both good and evil. Essentially, Christian anthropology constructs a human who stands in judgement, not before the throne of prejudicial reason or natural necessity, but before a transcendent God, under whom all truth, nature, and history are unified.

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[545] Ibid., P. 17.
[546] Ibid., P. 131.
[547] MMIS, P. 44.
[548] NDHN, P. 17.

Chapter 5: Mumford, Niebuhr, and the Self within the Technological Society

Introduction

The ultimate goal for this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Marcuse in order to create a new type of technological engagement from the basis of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. This chapter will continue with the prophetic methodology of critiquing the work of Lewis Mumford from the position of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. While the previous chapter demonstrated how Mumford's anthropology expresses itself as an easy conscience, the present chapter will introduce Lewis Mumford's critique of the technological society, and demonstrate how his anthropology—constructed as an easy conscience—obscures the ethical implications of that critique.

In keeping with the goal of this chapter, this chapter will do two things. First, (I) this chapter will lay out Mumford's critique of the technological society. Second, (II) this chapter will critique the ethical implications of Mumford's *easy conscience* in the technological society. Essentially, while the first section of this chapter will provide helpful insights for the final synthesis of the three thinkers observed in this thesis, the second section of this chapter will continue the prophetic critique of the anthropology supporting Mumford's observations.

I: Mumford's Self in the Technological Society

Mumford's picture of the technological society is presented as an historical unraveling of what makes the self, in Mumford's assessment, human. Indeed, in much the same way Mumford *constructs* his idyllic state of organicism, society's progression towards the technological society

slowly *deconstructs* the delicate balance of the human's organic *home state.* This section will demonstrate how Mumford's view of self and human nature unravels from the dawn of the technological society until the present state, what he calls "the Megamachine."

While this section will describe how the Megamachine came together, it is important to state here its working definition. Mumford defines the Megamachine as "…an invisible structure composed of living, but rigid, human parts, each assigned to his special office, role, and task, to make possible the immense work-output and grand designs of this great collective organism."[549] While this definition rightfully mentions the "invisible" quality of the Megamachine, it more greatly emphasizes its physical reality and goals.[550] However, it is important to also highlight, in the words of Adam Green, its "ideological structure" which merges together "a concatenation of machines into one sprawling complex built from the coexistence of multiple mechanical units, *of which human beings become part.*"[551] Essentially, the Megamachine is a social and *ideological* construction which exists as a web of interwoven religious, economic, philosophical, and historical conceptions that effectively integrate the human, society, and machines into one singular grand and ever-expanding machine.[552]

This section will show the process by which the organic human is psychologically and philosophically deconstructed and then fit into the Megamachine in the following three ways: (A) human imbalance, (B) mechanistic thinking, and (C) the rise of what Mumford calls, "the myth of the machine." This section will close with Mumford's final analysis of the human

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[549] MOM, P. 189.
[550] Echoing Mumford's more physical or labor-oriented view of Megamachine, in his book, *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (P. 301), Miller describes it as such: "[The Megamachine is] a labor machine composed entirely of human parts…" It is from this—as well as Mumford's—description that one gets the idea that this Megamachine Mumford describes is more than simply a social phenomenon, but a literal machine of which humans are a part.
[551] Green, "Matter and psyche," P. 39.
[552] Leo Marx posits that Mumford is utilizing the Jungian category of archetype to understand and describe the Megamachine; that the Megamachine is one of many "archetypal images" that humans draw from "the timeless, transcendent, shared realm of the collective conscience." (Hughes & Hughes, P. 179)

condition as it exists within the technological society, what he calls (D) "Organization Man." All three of these aspects of the technological society are mutually reinforcing, and culminate to create a new and, to Mumford, dreadful social matrix—one for which the individual and her society must overcome.

A. Human Imbalance

Before one can fully understand Mumford's articulation of human imbalance, it is important to define what Mumford calls, "technics." Mumford defines technics as "…that part of human activity wherein, by an energetic organization of the process of work, man controls and directs the forces of nature for his own purposes."[553] While he never explicitly differentiates "technics" and "technology," it is widely agreed that Mumford chose "technics" to imply "technical practices on all levels."[554] While this differentiation is brief, it is concise. For Mumford, technics is an all-encompassing attitude, order, and "process of production" that is comprised of "tools, machines, knowledge, skills and the arts."[555] Mumford seemingly opted to use the word "technics" over "technology" precisely because the former integrates the "industrial arts" into its definition, while "technology" indicates a more reductionist "systematic study."[556] For Mumford, "technics" is understood to be more permissive of an holistic approach, while "technology" is more prone to atomism.

The distinction between technology and technics is important, as Mumford will describe technics as something that is "more than hardware,"[557] and is rather more akin to the *culture* of technology. Most importantly, however, is that Mumford sees technics as the process of the

[553] Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1952), P. 15.
[554] Arthur P. Molella, "Mumford in Historiographical Context" in Hughes & Hughes, *Lewis Mumford*, P. 30.
[555] Hughes & Hughes, P. 9-10.
[556] Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, P. 326.
[557] Hughes & Hughes, P. 9.

human integrating his- or herself into work. Like his construction of the self, the process of this integration for Mumford must carry with it a sense of *balance*, or the human, like any other organism, will suffer. It is, therefore, Mumford's goal to discover and demonstrate where the imbalance of today's use of technics lies.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Mumford's view of the self is one who emerges from nature, is cognizant of its natural necessities, and can creatively influence its environment towards the benefit of one's person and culture. However, at the root of the human being who today practices technics, Mumford detects a "psychosis" or a "psychic disharmony [that] disrupt[s] the equilibrium of the whole physical organism…."[558] In keeping with his instrumentalist perspective, the problem with technics is primarily psychological, and the external technological or mechanistic environment is simply symptomatic, or at most symbiotic, of the deeper "psychic imbalances" at work in the human.[559] In other words, Mumford articulates the problem of technics as one that exists first in the mind. In fact, Mumford himself claims that one of his most essential goals is to "…describe what has happened to the Western European mind."[560]

The psychosis Mumford sees at work within modern technics is the product of an unhealthy imbalance in the human's relationship to two activities he calls "work" and "play"—two activities he sees as central to healthy technics. Mumford describes work as simply "compulsory labor" that is necessary for survival, and he describes the goals of work as "economic."[561] Play, on the other hand, is the seemingly "superfluous" activities (from the

[558] COM, P. 6.
[559] Swer describes Mumford's thought pertaining to the relationship between the mind and technology in the following way: "Modern technics is the externalization of humanity's fractured inner life." ("Technics and (para)praxis," P. 50)
[560] MWD, P. 97.
[561] COM, P. 5.

perspective of the technological society) that are "just as essential to human development as the economic."[562] Speaking on the concept of play, Mumford states, "…in these realms man gains a fuller insight into his surroundings, his community and himself."[563] Play is what Mumford calls the human's "higher activities," or leisure;[564] they are what allow the human to transcend the "… dumb repetitions of his animal role."[565] Play is formulating one's actions, not from a position of necessity or repetition, but from the seemingly random and organic superfluities of human behavior.

For Mumford, work and play are conjoined at the "trunk" and "cannot be detached."[566] Without work, Mumford argues, humans "…would not have produced enough spare energy to maintain their higher activities."[567] Essentially, to repeat the old adage, without work, there is no play. However, on the other hand, if all of life is work, "man cannot enjoy these higher activities."[568] The balance between work and play is essential for *organic* balance, and represents for Mumford the key to maintaining a healthy use of "technics."

Additionally, while both work and play are equally necessary for Mumford, he admits that play, and all the activities that emerge from play (art, music, etc.), spring forth from work and economic goals. Mumford states, "Thus man's released activities grow out of his conditioned activities: the esthetic flower out of the economic leaf."[569] This is not to say that work is more important than play, but rather that work has an additional justification for existence than just simply surviving. Mumford states, "Man gains, through work, the insight into

[562] COL, P. 35.
[563] COM, P. 5.
[564] Ibid., P. 5.
[565] COL, P. 40.
[566] Ibid., P. 4.
[567] Ibid., P. 5.
[568] Ibid.
[569] COM, P. 5.

nature he needs to transmute work into artifacts and symbols that have a use beyond ensuring his immediate animal survival. The ultimate justification of work lies not alone in the performance and the product but in the realm of the arts and sciences."[570] For Mumford, humans work not only to ensure survival, but to grow the arena of human play. If technics are only devised to produce necessary human ends without expanding its more subjective and aesthetic needs, the imbalance in the self grows and psychosis sets in.

Therefore, the first imbalance Mumford detects within contemporary technics is the disregard for the seemingly superfluous aspects of human life. Mumford argues that technics is only sought for the purposes of "enlarging [humanity's] capacities to consume," and no longer for "liberating [humanity's] capacities to create."[571] For Mumford, the superfluous is the seedbed for freedom and creativity.

The psychological consequences of technics shifting from one that enlarges the human's capacity to consume and produce over and against liberating one's capacity to create are profound. For Mumford, as the human becomes more inclined to the strictly economic goals of life, namely production and survival, the "…super-ego, exclusively preoccupied with its own order, denies the function of the id and cuts itself off from the vitality that should serve it."[572] Mumford concludes, "Carried far enough that repression must lead to the destruction of the personality…."[573] Stated succinctly, only a fraction of the self is maintained in modern technics, and the person as a whole, particularly its "higher activities," becomes repressed and inhibited.

[570] Ibid.
[571] Ibid., P. 5.
[572] Ibid., P. 366.
[573] Ibid.

B. Mechanistic Thinking

The psychotic imbalance of the individual is perpetuated in part by an "unconscious bias of mechanism," or what he calls "mechanistic thinking."[574] Mumford maintains that mechanistic thinking started in the medieval period and stretched all the way until the Industrial Revolution, but reached its climax, so far as the development of the modern mind is concerned, in the 17th century—a period he calls the "eotechnic phase."[575] For Mumford, the eotechnic phase is the period of incubation that developed the psychology, philosophy, and culture—the mechanistic thinking—that would form the epistemic foundation from which the technological society would grow. This phase would see the rise of what Mumford considers to be the three most influential developments of modern technics: the clock, the Scientific Revolution, and capitalism.

Of the three developments Mumford sees as most consequential for mechanistic thinking, the clock is the only development that is a physical object. However, it is more than simply a gadget; the clock, in the words of Mumford, is a "new medium of existence."[576] It is for this reason that Mumford claims "The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age."[577] While Mumford maintains that the use of the mechanical clock was initiated in the Benedictine monasteries of the 10th century, eventually "The instrument…spread outside the monastery; and the regular striking of the bells brought a new regularity into the life of the workman and the merchant."[578]

The clock's gradual ubiquity throughout Europe set the stage for the eotechnic phase. Mumford states, "The bells of the clock tower almost defined urban existence. Time-keeping

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[574] Ibid., P. 35.
[575] Mumford does not give hard dates for these ages, but the eotechnic phase generally stretches from the medieval period until the 18th century.
[576] TAC, P. 17.
[577] Ibid., P. 14.
[578] Ibid.

passed into time-serving and time-accounting and time-rationing. As this took place, Eternity ceased gradually to serve as the measure and focus of human actions."[579] It is important to highlight two aspects of the clock revealed in this statement: how time-keeping passes into time-serving and how time-keeping passes into time-rationing. He is ultimately claiming that both the human (time-serving) and the organic world (time-rationing) are now subjected to the abstract measurements of a machine. It is in this way that the clock, for Mumford, represents not only the literal beginning of both the eotechnic phase and modern technics, but also a metaphor for what is to come with what he calls the "Megamachine." The human enslaves the self and one's environment to the abstract measurements of a machine that the human created.

If the clock represents the beginning of the organic world's enslavement to the abstract measurements of the fourth dimension, Mumford maintains that the Scientific Revolution is the beginning of the organic world's enslavement to the abstract measurements, principles, and laws of the other three dimensions. According to Mumford's articulation of organic balance, there is more to the human and nature than what is quantifiable, predictable, and controllable;[580] however, the integration of science as an ideology into human consciousness has for Mumford supplanted the human's more holistic understanding of nature and self, giving way to a more mechanistic and partial perspective on reality.[581] Mumford states: "For the world, as conceived by Galileo, Newton, and Descartes was a world stripped of all its dionysian qualities: a world in

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[579] Ibid.

[580] Donald Miller makes a strong case that Mumford was greatly influenced by the 18th century Italian philosopher, Giovanni Battista Vico, in his articulation of two distinct types of knowledge: the imaginative universal and the intelligible universal. Miller describes the latter as "a narrowly focused, object-oriented epistemology in which reality is apprehended by the intellect, not the imagination," while the former is "a holistic mode of understanding that relies heavily on the sensations." (*Lewis Mumford*, P. 418)

[581] In MOM (P. 277), Mumford rails against the development of the scientific ideology during the Scientific Revolution by describing its imperialistic pursuits of breaking apart nature and constantly expanding out into the knowable universe. He states, "This combination of traits was in due course transmitted to the scientific ideology of the seventeenth century: a readiness to entertain daring hypotheses, a willingness to dismember organic complexities, while subjecting every new theoretic insight to cautious observation and experimental test."

which color, form, pattern, sound were [sic] meaningless, except as mathematical quantities, and in which feeling and desire and imagination were disreputable."[582] While there remains some controversy over whether Mumford was completely against all things scientific,[583] he is quite clear at minimum that the new world the Scientific Revolution created destroyed the former realms of meaning that gave the human purpose and demonstrated one's most creative and unique characteristics.

The final major development during the eotechnic phase that, according to Mumford, proceeded to complete society's penchant for mechanistic thinking is the development of capitalism. Capitalism introduced a "…concentration on abstract quantities…[that] isolated from the tissue of events just those factors that could be judged on an impersonal, quantitative scale."[584] Much like science and the clock before it, Mumford argues that capitalism enslaves modern thinking to a way of valuing the world in monetary, abstract terms, thus ridding the organic, qualitative, and subjective properties of life from conscious thought.

When taken together, these three create mechanistic thinking, which, according to Mumford, would go on to destroy the reigning mythologies that once contained the highest values of society. Mumford states, "…it tended to destroy the lingering mythologies of Greek goddesses and Christian heroes and saints…this process took place in all the arts; it affects poetry as well as architecture."[585] Effectively, these abstractions destroyed the old sources of meaning without immediately replacing them, leaving culture ready and waiting to construct new

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[582] COL, P. 202.
[583] For those who see Mumford as opposed to science altogether, see: Everett Mendelsohn, "Prophet of Our Discontent" (Hughes & Hughes, P. 357); Gerald Horton, "A Review of *The Pentagon of Power*" (*New York Times*, 13 December, 1970). For those who see Mumford as maintaining a more nuanced critique of a particular kind of science, see: E.J. Hobsbawm, "Is Science Evil?" (*The New York Review of Books*, 19 November, 1970); Miller, *Lewis Mumford*, P. 418-419.
[584] MOM, P. 278.
[585] TAC, P. 331.

myths to describe its world, its meaning, and its purpose, but do so from the basis of these abstractions. This for Mumford will be the window through which society will develop and adopt what he calls the "myth of the machine."

C. The Myth of the Machine

As previously described, mechanistic thinking is the cognitive act of assigning that which is organic or non-organic to abstract properties, functions, and goals. It is effectively the kind of thinking necessary to make machines. However, Mumford is not content with simply stating that a technological society thinks mechanically. Instead, Mumford observes a wide-ranging, all-inclusive social phenomenon that culminates in the creation of what he calls, "the myth of the machine."[586]

While Mumford's understanding of meaning is derived from his myth of organicism, balance, and wholeness, he argues that modern technics is derived from a myth that dehumanizes and objectifies humanity and nature. By extracting the human and nature's functional value from their otherwise organically balanced state, and fit together as if they were cogs in a machine, a new relationship is forged between the human and nature; one that is defined by its mutual exploitation and total integration of one to the other.

However, the myth of the machine is far more than an explanation of two coexisting entities (human and nature), but rather it is cradled and perpetuated by a new social order that works to affirm the overarching myth. For Mumford, the myth of the machine is what fills the vacuum left by the disintegration of art and religion, and becomes the new element of social cohesion that would go on to create the ultimate object of mechanization: human society itself. For Mumford, the move towards this new social myth is an historical event that can be traced to

[586] MOM, P. 95, 175, 274.

a particular time period at the end of the eotechnic phase, bridging into what he would call the paleotechnic and neotechnic phases, respectively.[587]

While Mumford articulates the switch from the paleotechnic phase (17th century to 20th century) to the neotechnic phase (early 20th century to present) with varying levels of significance throughout his career,[588] what will remain most significant for Mumford is the *manner* in which he sees society change from the eotechnic phase to the paleotechnic phase. On the one hand, for all the innovative abstract thought that came to define the eotechnic phase, Mumford views this period as harboring a relatively admirable organic balance of its own.[589] However, on the other hand, the *perception* of the world that was developed in the eotechnic phase would become the *physical reality* of the paleotechnic phase. The human's environment, culture, and social world would ultimately be fit to conform to the cognitive instruments of abstraction previously conceived. In his own words, the human at this point in history will have "…not only conquered nature, but detached himself as far as possible from the organic habitat."[590]

In Mumford's view, a massive upheaval took place between the eotechnic and paleotechnic phases that can only be described as a kind of religious transformation of culture. In his *Myth of the Machine*, Mumford argues that what appears to be a very new religious construction of culture is actually quite old, embedded in the mythology and praxis of ancient

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[587] It should be noted that Mumford later becomes critical of these divisions of eotechnic, paleotechnic, and neotechnic. See: Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (P. 326). Nevertheless, the demarcation provides for his readers a certain historical and conceptual basis for understanding Mumford's view of "the fall," as it were, as Mumford himself certainly understands there to be a significant cultural change that is grounded in history.
[588] In their article, "Lewis Mumford and the ecology of technics" (*New Jersey Journal of Communication* Vol. 8 Is. 1, 2000: P. 64), Lance Strate and Casey Man Kong Lum affirm that while Mumford was "…cautiously optimistic about the potential of the neotechnic era…This is a view he would later reverse, as he came to see that the new technics still supported and even extended centralized power…."
[589] TAC, P. 111.
[590] MOM, P. 3.

Egypt—which, according to Mumford, is the earliest known appearance of the Megamachine.[591] The ancient empire that built the pyramids and boasted a highly complex economy with extraordinary agricultural efficiency derived, not simply from a linear progression of innovations, but rather from a religiously devout constituency of workers. These workers, who Mumford calls "servo-mechanisms," married together in their minds the exploits of labor with spiritualized servitude, existing symbiotically with zealous subservience to a king who represented a "…fusion of sacred and temporal power."[592]

Regarding the *first* Megamachine—the prototype developed in Egypt—Mumford claims that "The myth of the machine and the cult of divine kingship rose together." In other words, the religious servitude of the people and its corresponding social mythology emerged concomitantly with the deification of their king. The work of the people as a collective machine was in and of itself the divine reason for their existence *and simultaneously* the work of their god-king. The place of the divine and the place of a people's identity in society as workers came together in the identity of Pharaoh: the commander of workers and divine ruler—who Mumford calls, the "prime mover."[593] Their faith in a god-king transmuted into the religiously justified slavery of a people.

Regarding the new Megamachine that Mumford saw at work in modern technics, there is no king, but rather the machine itself would become the object of worship. The myth at work supporting today's Megamachine is not like the Egyptian's divine pharaohs or gods, but rather a certain historical perspective of humanity. Mumford describes the myth of the machine as an historical distortion of human nature in the mind of the worker. He states:

[591] MOM, P. 168-187.
[592] Ibid., P. 170.
[593] Ibid., P. 163.

> Modern man has formed a curiously distorted picture of himself, by interpreting his early history in terms of his present interests in making machines and conquering nature. And then in turn he has justified his present concerns by calling his prehistoric self a tool-making animal, and assuming that the material instruments of production dominated all his other activities.[594]

Effectively, Mumford is arguing that the reigning mythology in a technological society is a warped view of history that perceives the self—at its very origin and nature—primarily as a *worker* in an economy, not as one who works in order to *play* in a community. In other words, humans have constructed a flawed view of self that justifies its own servitude and further intensifies its own psychosis. This is the essence of Mumford's articulation of the "myth of the machine."

D. Organization Man

As stated from the outset of this chapter, Mumford's picture of the technological society is presented as an historical unraveling of what makes the self, in Mumford's assessment, human. The exaltation of abstract thought and the reduction of the entire organic world into mechanistic thinking and value has for Mumford created a certain psychosis among humans who both participate in (laborers) and benefit from (consumers) modern technics. For Mumford, the result of this unraveling is a severe imbalance of the self, leaving humanity careering towards the loss of its most essential organic nature.[595]

Mumford's view of the self as it exists within the technological society culminates in his concept of the "Organization Man." Mumford defines the Organization Man as one who "…takes all his orders from the system, and who…cannot conceive of any departure from the system even in the interest of efficiency, still less for the sake of creating a more intelligent,

[594] Ibid., P. 14.
[595] Mumford states, "Instead of functioning actively as an autonomous personality, man will become a passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal…" (MOM, P. 3)

vivid, purposeful, humanly rewarding mode of life.[596] As harrowing as it may seem, Mumford believes this description awaits all humans within the technological society unless there is some intervention. For Mumford, the Megamachine produces "…imprisoned minds that have no capacity for appraising the results of their process, except by the archaic criteria of power and prestige, property, productivity and profit..."[597]

But what exactly is the binding element that infuses the self to the machine in this way? What, in Mumford's view, is the nature of the relationship between the human and machine, so as to create such a bleak picture of the self? Comparing the relationship of human-to-machine that he analyzes during his own time with that which is observable before modern technics, Mumford is moved to ask a similar question at the beginning of his major work, *Technics and Civilization*: "How did this happen? How in fact could the machine take *possession* of European society until that society had, by an *inner accommodation*, *surrendered* to the machine?"[598] The manner in which Mumford phrases this question reveals three distinguishing elements to the problem he sees at the core of the human's relationship to the Megamachine: (1) the Megamachine's *possession* of the individual, (2) the *inner accommodation* of the individual, and (3) the *surrender* of the individual to the Megamachine. The purpose of this section is to investigate all three elements of this statement alongside Mumford's work in order to show the nature of the self as it exists within the technological society—what Mumford calls, "Organization Man."

[596] POP, P. 192.
[597] Ibid.
[598] TAC, P. 4. Emphasis added.

1. The Megamachine Taking Possession of Self

For an Instrumental theorist, Mumford comes extraordinarily close to ascribing agency to the Megamachine by drawing a nearly indistinguishable comparison between society and a machine that has an intractable grasp on the consciousness and activities of human beings. In his essay, "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," Leo Marx wrestles with this very question regarding the nature and extent of the Megamachine's "possession" of the individual, and demonstrates the difficulty in distinguishing Mumford's overly 'Manichean' (mechanical v. organic thinking and living) and abstract rhetoric with his more concrete assessment regarding the kind of society within which one is actually living.

On the one hand, as Leo Marx argues, it appears at times that this large and menacing depiction of the all-controlling Megamachine is strictly rhetorical for Mumford. Marx argues that it adds "persuasive power" and "conceptual unity" to Mumford's argument to portray the Megamachine as a type of ideologically-conjured mechanical demiurge holding the angelically organic world captive. Marx states:

> …this Manichean vision lends an admirable coherence and drama to Mumford's work…at times in fact it makes his oeuvre seem like a huge, panoramic morality play in which actors representing key abstractions—especially those indefatigable rivals, Organicism and Mechanism—contend on a world-historical stage.[599]

If it is simply a rhetorical jolt Mumford is employing when he claims "…but now that the [myth of the machine] idea has been completely embodied, we can recognize that it had left no place for man. He is reduced to a standardized servo-mechanism,"[600] Marx would find that this wording "…lends an admirable coherence and drama to Mumford's work."[601] However, if

[599] Marx, Hughes & Hughes, P. 172-173.
[600] POP, P. 430.
[601] Ibid., P. 172.

Mumford really means that such a mythically conjured social structure really takes possession of the human, Marx rightly argues that such an assertion of a "totalizing doctrine" would indeed be a "disconcertingly tendentious…aspect of Mumford's writing."[602]

Aside from the potential rhetorical value of describing such a daunting and all-controlling social machine, the question of whether or not Mumford *really means* that the Megamachine takes possession of the human through one's own mythical and mechanistic thinking is integral to understanding how Mumford perceives the relationship between the human and machine or technology. One must ask, does Mumford truly believe that mechanistic ideas, mediated through and perpetuated by the myth of the machine, can hold human beings hostage in potentially harmful social and political structures? Perhaps more precisely, "can ideas control humans?"

To answer this question, Marx turns to one of Mumford's most overt statements regarding the self as it exists within the technological society. Regarding his conception of the socially and mythically constructed Megamachine, Mumford states:

> *Now to call these collective entities machines is no idle play on words*…. [T[he great labor machine was *in every aspect a genuine machine*: all the more because its components, though made of human bone, nerve, and muscle, were reduced to their bare mechanical elements and rigidly standardized for the performance of their limited tasks. *The taskmaster's lash ensured conformity*.[603]

Like any other material within a machine, the human is merely another resistant component that is flattened out, specialized, and fit into the machine—the victim of a "lash-ensured conformity." By his own admission, Mumford is stating *this is no idle play on words*. There is no mere metaphor or analogy to be interpreted with this description. He means this quite literally: the human is now a part of the machine, and thereby in its possession.

However, what is perplexing is Mumford's insistence that the Megamachine still operates under "human control." Regarding his view of the prototypical model, ancient Egypt, this is

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[602] Ibid.
[603] MOM, P. 191. Emphasis added.

easier to imagine, as there is such a figure as the Prime Mover who is guiding and directing the machine and all the human "servo-mechanisms" there within. But there is no Prime Mover in Mumford's contemporary description of the Megamachine, so how is a machine controlled by humans while humans are also the ones who are "possessed?"

Mumford's confusion on this point is quite revealing, as his more innocuous presuppositions regarding technology as an Instrumentalist are in conflict with his more critical and romantic impulses. Mumford needs to be able to argue that modern technics are destructive as they possess the human (romanticism), all the while maintaining that the human who creates and employs modern technics is still somehow good and in control of the machine.

While the next two sections will examine the exact process that Mumford describes regarding the Megamachine's possession of humanity, it is important to note that no matter how he conceives of this process, Mumford clearly posits that the Megamachine literally takes possession of the human. As quoted previously, "this is no idle play on words…[the Megamachine is] in every aspect a genuine machine…the taskmaster's lash ensured conformity." In his conclusion regarding whether it is the case that Mumford truly believes this possession is the case, Leo Marx states the following:

> …here I am not questioning the extent or the quality of his learning. My doubts, rather, have to do with his…tendency to impute historical agency to disembodied abstractions—especially the controlling organic and machine metaphors…. [Mumford] regard[s] history as driven by unmoored ideas afloat….above the surface occupied by people and events.[604]

Marx argues that the core of Mumford's thought rests on the presupposition that the ideas upholding the Megamachine can somehow truly take possession of a person and culture in history—that this construct has social and historical agency. Marx further points out that as early as 1934, Mumford advocates for a "virtually autonomous agent of history."[605] To put it another

[604] Leo Marx, P.174.
[605] Ibid., P. 175.

way, Mumford envisions a kind of Frankensteinian Demiurge—a socially created body of ideas that enslave their angelic creators.

2. The Inner Accommodation of Self

In order for the myth of the machine to consume the human being, even to the point of becoming possessed by the Megamachine, Mumford must articulate a certain internal psychological or philosophical breaking point where the human finally gives in to such oppression. For Mumford, this begins with what he calls, the "Megatechnic Bribe,"[606] and ends with one's tacit worship to the system itself.

Mumford's understanding of the Megatechnic[607] Bribe is exactly how it sounds: the human effectively gives up the self and its freedom in exchange for the privileges one can possess in the technological society. Mumford states:

> Provided the consumer agrees to accept what megatechnics offers, in quantities favorable to the continued expansion of the whole power system, he will be granted all the perquisites, privileges, seductions, and pleasures of the affluent society. If only he demands no goods or services except those that can be organized or manufactured by megatechnics, he will without doubt enjoy a higher standard of material culture….[608]

For Mumford, that which is organic is rejected for the glimmering jewels of the Megamachine. The Megatechnic bribe is an "addiction" to a variety of idols like "progress," the "conquest of nature," and "silly fantasies" that mistakenly justifies the human's willingness to "…accept this totalitarian control…not as a horrid sacrifice but as a highly desirable fulfillment."[609]

For Mumford, it is the bribe that opens the door to the "unconscious bias of mechanism."[610] However, the mechanical bias, once firmly entrenched in the psyche, is

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[606] POP, P. 330.
[607] "Megatechnics" is a term Mumford uses as a short-form conflation of two concepts: "Modern Technics" and "Megamachine." They are the technologically manufactured products only attainable via the Megamachin. (MOM, P. 189)
[608] POP, P. 330-331.
[609] Ibid., P. 331.
[610] COL, P. 35.

perpetuated by the governing myth and social structure of the Megamachine. The interaction of the Megatechnic Bribe and the socially reinforcing mythos of the Megamachine trap the individual into a self-perpetuating loop of inorganic thinking, living, and relating, to the point that the human "…detach[es] himself as far as possible from the organic habitat."[611] From here, once human consciousness—which is for Mumford the sole creator and supplier of meaning in the universe—becomes integrated into the machine, all of the known universe is enveloped into a totalizing system of meaning within the mind of the individual. People are laborers and consumers, the organic world is a heap of dead resources, and time is the tick of the clock.

In his own words, Mumford calls the myth of the machine "absolutely irresistible…That magical spell still enthralls both the controllers and the mass victims of the Megamachine today."[612] Through the tandem forces of the human's inner accommodation on the one hand, and the Megamachine's ubiquitous and possessive qualities on the other, Mumford holds that the human inevitably surrenders wholly to the myth of the machine. Mumford calls today's humans, "system worshippers."[613] The human has bought into the idea that he or she exists only to work and consume, and therefore directs one's worship to that structure from whence those needs are fulfilled. In the Megamachine, human surrender is the apex of holiness according to the myth of the machine. The one who surrenders is, what Mumford calls, "The Hero of our Time."[614]

Along these lines, Mumford argues that the "ideal creature [of] this present age [is] the robot,"[615] one who is made in the image of the machine itself:[616] what he calls, Organization

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[611] MOM, P. 3.
[612] Ibid., P. 224.
[613] MWD, P. 207
[614] POP, P. 279.
[615] Ibid., P. 277.
[616] In his book, *Bereft of Reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986. P. 165), Eugene Halton defends Mumford as he reflects upon the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles when "no human hand" lit the flame, but instead "an athlete ignited a machine of fire…which raced upward to a chimney toward beyond human reach." This for Halton represented the "mechanization of the sacred."

Man. Like the most efficient gear in a machine, the most successful and highest-ranking humans in status are those who work most efficiently within the Megamachine—those who obey without a hitch, as it were. Effectively, the highest aim for those who surrender to the myth of the machine is the Organization Man: one "whose further potentialities for life and growth have been suppressed for the purpose of controlling the fractional energies that are left, and feeding them into a mechanically ordered collective system."[617]

To drive this point to its conclusion, Mumford uses the example Adolf Eichmann, one of the chief organizers of the Holocaust, as an example of one who has surrendered completely, and thus should be revered by the standards of the Megamachine. He states:

> …Eichmann, the obedient exterminator, who carried out Hitler's policy and Himmler's orders with unswerving fidelity, should be hailed as the 'Hero of Our Time.' But unfortunately our time has produced many such heroes who have been willing to do at a safe distance, with napalm or atom bombs, by a mere press of the release button, what the exterminators…did by old-fashioned handicraft methods.[618]

Mumford points to Eichmann as one who exemplifies every value within the myth of the machine. Eichmann offered no resistance, he followed orders, and was in turn appropriately rewarded with promotions and plaudits that a worshipper of the Megamachine should receive according to its own values. Eichmann exists purely as a laborer, and a laborer he shall be to his fullest extent. Yet the horrifying results of such a person speak for themselves: one dehumanized servo-mechanism exterminating those he can only perceive as millions of other dehumanized servo-mechanisms. And it does not stop there, as there "are now countless Eichmanns in administrative offices, in business corporations…in the armed forces…ready to carry out any…sanctioned fantasy, however dehumanized and debased."[619] For Mumford, Eichmann

[617] Ibid.
[618] Ibid., P. 279
[619] Ibid.

represents both the present and the future of humanity,[620] absent some disruption of the myth of the machine.

II: Ethical Implications of Mumford's Easy Conscience in the Technological Society

While Mumford establishes a particularly cogent analysis regarding what the technological society is through his concept of the "myth of the machine" and the "Megatechnic Bribe," his anthropology as expressed as an easy conscience limits his ability to prescribe a realistic way forward. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, there are two consequences of the easy conscience: first, the easy conscience obscures one's perception of the world, culminating in unrealistic attempts to save oneself from its various evils; second, while the easy conscience assuages any suspicion that evil could come from one's volition, it cannot assuage the problem of anxiety, and indeed compounds it. This section will address how Mumford's anthropology leads to both under the following headings, respectively: (A) Obscured World; Unrealistic Salvation and (B) Compounded Anxiety.

A. Obscured World; Unrealistic Salvation

As established in the previous chapter, for Mumford, consciousness is the center of the universe, and in one's original state of consciousness, the human is good. This anthropological formulation establishes for Mumford an easy conscience which obscures his understanding of the technological society by articulating its problems primarily as a defect of consciousness.[621] As a result, Mumford will extrapolate various means of salvation from the evils of technological

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[620] "Man will become a passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal whose proper function…will either be fed into the machine or strictly limited and controlled for the benefit of de-personalized, collective organizations." (MOM, P. 3)

[621] The distinction between 'conscience' and 'consciousness' is deliberate; 'conscience' is used as an ethical category in the context of the easy and uneasy conscience, while 'consciousness' is the most basic state of human awareness that is distinguished as an objective category that can be observed from various scientific perspectives: e.g. psychological, biological, sociological, etc.

society which require simply a retreat towards a certain original and ideal state: that of organic balance. Effectively, given the easy conscience at the center of Mumford's anthropology and his presumptions that technology is neutral, the technological society is manageable simply by correcting one's thinking.

Mumford's easy conscience, specifically expressed as a mind which harbors the supremely powerful conscious (idola), leads towards a confusing ethical complex: the human must save the human from one's own mind, *with* the power of one's own mind. On the one hand, Mumford states, "We cannot save our cunning inventions and our complicated apparatus of scientific research unless we save man."[622] In other words, the human needs saving from its psychosis. On the other hand, armed with human consciousness, humanity can "[re-orient] our technics [by] bringing it more completely into harmony...."[623] Mumford's goal is to cure one's psychosis by changing and implementing the idola in one's mind—change the Megamachine that humans created by changing the way humans think. Essentially, good and evil originate from the same consciousness, so the good consciousness—that of organic thinking—must will out against the evil consciousness—that of mechanistic thinking.

Ultimately, Mumford must find a way to transform the sickened and fractured mechanistic mind into that which is natural, balanced, and organic; to create an "ideology so profoundly organic that it will be capable of bringing together the severed halves of modern man…"[624] This goal will express itself in the form of two forms of salvation: (1) psychological re-orientation and (2) myth-making. This section will describe both forms of salvation and then (3) respond in turn with a Niebuhrian response suited to each.

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[622] COL, P. 4.
[623] TAC, P. 434.
[624] SOU, P. 22-23.

1. Psychological Re-Orientation

As stated previously, Mumford articulates the problem of the technological society as an "unconscious bias of mechanism"[625] that must be remedied by way of "transforming the psychological."[626] The problem is not simply a desire for the mechanized life, but rather it is a psychosis at the center of the unconscious that is perpetually pushing the self further and further into more fragmentary and abstract categories of self- and natural-valuation. Because the problem is so deep within the psyche, Mumford argues that one must essentially deprogram, then reprogram the psychoses of individuals who are trapped within the mechanistic culture. The goal is to rediscover the idolum of organic balance that, he contends, still exists within the unconscious, and then find a way to refashion that idolum within common practice.

The first step in finding salvation, in true Romantic and Thoreauvian form,[627] Mumford argues that one must move towards "withdrawal and rejection."[628] For Mumford, mechanization is so attached to one's unconscious that one must leave society and its luxuries to find something transcendent about the self. True psychological healing, he argues, is simply not possible without first abstaining from the technological society. Mumford even states that withdrawal and rejection is necessary for "a recovery of inner autonomy," as if the human's very sense of self-determination is lost in the technological society.

Once one has withdrawn and rejected the mechanistic society, Mumford posits that one will find the "archetypal pattern of The Great Good Place,"[629] a term he borrows from the book

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[625] COL, P. 35.
[626] Ibid., P. 22.
[627] As in the form of Henry David Thoreau: one who withdraws from society for personal enlightenment. See: *Walden* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997).
[628] COL, P. 252.
[629] COL, P. 263.

by Henry James of the same name.[630] This archetypal pattern will house his concept of the idolum of organic balance, and will essentially be the manifestation of that idolum over and against the mechanistic society. It is placing the emphasis of life, not on efficiency and work, but on the "spiritual" necessities of the organic self. It is a mindset built upon and around withdrawal and introspection.

It is important to note that Mumford is not necessarily advocating for all to physically withdraw *permanently* from society to create this environment of convalescence, but rather to grant a level of space for one's imagination to clearly construct a new vision of life towards which one should live that reflects organic balance. Mumford states, "Each one of us…may play a part in extricating himself from the power system by asserting his primacy as a person in quiet acts of mental and physical withdrawal."[631] Effectively, Mumford believes that if one is bold enough to "extricate" oneself from the Megamachine, one may release oneself of the psychosis of the technological society and regain some semblance of organic balance.

2. Myth-Making of the Idolum

Running parallel to and supporting Mumford's program of psychological re-orientation and reconstruction emerges perhaps his most valuable insight regarding the technological society: his recognition of the power of myths and religion in society, and his diagnosis of the mechanistic society as harboring a generative myth of its own. For Mumford, the problem of the technological society is primarily psychological, but he found that myth is a powerful tool utilized to convey psychological meaning.[632]

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[630] Henry James' *The Great Good Place* is a work of fiction that imagines a writer whose hectic life is deteriorating his psychological state. The writer is then at once transported to a utopian resort where he is slowly restored through rest and pleasure. (New York, NY, Paragon House, 1989)

[631] POP, 433.

[632] Greene argues that Mumford is still very much working in step with Jung at this point. He claims that Mumford understood that "Jung's achievement…was in creating a mythology in which the unconscious became 'independent and eternal." ("Matter and psyche," P. 45)

As mentioned previously, the emergence of mechanistic thinking had a deleterious effect on the old mythologies, leaving culture increasingly free from the older religious notions of value and meaning, and opening the door for the myth of the machine to prevail. However, in order to resist the myth of the machine, Mumford argues for the importance of creating new myths, even as the old myths die away: "If our knowledge of human behavior counts for anything…we cannot put aside old myths without creating new ones…. The nearest we can get to rationality is not to efface our myths but to attempt to infuse them with right reason, and to alter them or exchange them for other myths when they appear to work badly."[633] For Mumford, abandoning myths must lead to the creation of new myths. Without the conscious development of myths, the myths that society will inevitably develop will not reflect the highest consciousness of humanity. Here Mumford is simply advocating for myths that more closely resemble "right reason."

As previously discussed, the Megamachine is the result of the collective adherence of society to what Mumford calls, "the myth of the machine." Utilizing ancient Egypt as an archetype,[634] Mumford describes the human's relationship with the Megamachine as "…a profound magico-religious faith in the system itself, as expressed in the cult of the gods."[635] Thus, in order to counteract the myth of the machine, Mumford constructs a bevy of central tenets for a myth of his own making that all counter that of the myth of the machine.

First, Mumford addresses what he sees as the very root of the Megamachine: how the human understands the self. In *Myth of the Machine*, Mumford argues that the human has a

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[633] SOU, P. 301.
[634] While not stated explicitly, it is widely held that Mumford uses Jung's understanding of an archetype as a timelessly engrained image within the collective consciousness which forms a "…preconscious psychic disposition…" (Carl Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1990. P. 121). See: Greene ("Matter and Psyche," P. 62), Marx (Hughes & Hughes, P. 176) and Miller (*Lewis Mumford*, P. 530).
[635] MOM*, P. 229.*

serious misconception of self, as one whose primary value is economic and labor-oriented: "*Homo faber*, Man the Tool-Maker."[636] However, Mumford attempts to correct this myth with that of the organic myth: the human was not created to work, but also to play;[637] the human was not created to specialize in one means of survival, but was created to evolve and adapt, "to come up with more than one answer to the same problem;"[638] the human mind is not fashioned for mere survival, but for creativity.[639]

As opposed to the myth of the machine, which suggest the human was created for the Megamachine,[640] Mumford corrects this understanding by arguing that humans belong to an emerging nature.[641] From there, Mumford argues that the human's nature is not simply work, but play, art, and creativity,[642] and in granting those more subjective qualities as a part of nature and the human being, technology should be directed towards an organic balance of nature, not simply efficiency and production.

The final trait Mumford seeks to implement into his myth of organic balance is a reorientation of God. To be clear, Mumford sees God as little more than that concept towards which humans have traditionally attempted to "…affix his own special interests and preoccupations, often of the most limited range to cosmic and organic processes."[643] While he does not see a problem fundamentally with belief in a god, Mumford argues, "we err merely in our effort to cast this intuition in a too-familiar mold, in order to pass more freely from the known to the unknown."[644] In short, Mumford argues that the human's concept of God should

[636] MOM, P. 102.
[637] COL, P. 27.
[638] MOM, P. 107.
[639] Ibid., P. 35.
[640] Ibid., P. 208.
[641] See: Chapter 4.II.A.
[642] MOM, P. 35-37.
[643] COL, P. 70.
[644] Ibid.

not be one that is grounded immutably in nature, but rather as one who "…emerges from the universe, as the far -off event of creation that that ultimate realization of the person towards which creation seems to move."[645] Mumford proclaims, "God exists, not at the beginning, but at the end."[646]

Mumford's concept of God is quite indicative of his entire program of thought. Mumford all but embraces and promotes a Manichean duality to his mythological metaphysic. Mumford states:

> A sound philosophy…must embrace the facts of human experience hitherto represented in the symbols of a creative god and a destructive devil: the one directed toward greater fulfillment of life, the other tempting it to lose sight of its higher goals and regress to lower planes of evolution…. Thus God, as I seek here to interpret human experience, is not the foundation of human existence: he is the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that lead men onward in their journey toward the Promised Land.[647]

Articulated within theological language, it becomes clearer how Mumford interprets reality and his sources of salvation. Mumford needs the human to truly *believe* in the *ideas* of organic balance to move human culture towards its rightful place. The human must reorient one's worship so that the emphasis is upon true organic progress as aligned in nature, not a regression into the "…animal tendency to repetition, fixation, automatism."[648]

3. Niebuhrian Critique

The Niebuhrian response to Mumford's salvation comes in two parts: first, the evils of the technological society cannot be eradicated simply by returning to one's original state (organic balance), and second, the technological society is not manageable simply by conforming to one's highest ideals (myth-making). Mumford's insistence that both can be achieved is uniquely dependent upon an easy conscience which is incapable of understanding "the reality of

[645] Ibid., P. 71.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Ibid., P. 73, 75.
[648] COL, P. 33.

evil in himself," and commits the "error of attributing evil to any one but himself."[649] For Mumford, the human is essentially good, both naturally and rationally, and it is only the corruption of that good that one can too easily correct.

Both of his projects—psychological re-orientation and myth making—culminate to create a muddled form of salvation that is one part naturalistic and one part rationalistic. He states, "we need an *ideology* so profoundly *organic* that it will be capable of bringing together the severed halves of modern man…"[650] While Mumford may presume that combining both approaches of naturalism and rationalism better equips him to address the evils of the technological society, the two are compounded in such a way so as to remove responsibility even further from the realm of human freedom. As Niebuhr states, "Nature and reason are thus the two gods of modern man, and sometimes the two are one. In either case man is essentially secure because he is not seriously estranged from the realm of harmony and order."[651] Effectively, combining the two simply gives Mumford more ways to think highly of humanity, and more ways to evade responsibility.

Regarding his *naturalistic* project to withdraw from society in order to re-orient the human psyche with some lost state of organic balance, Mumford evades responsibility by way of what Niebuhr identifies as the impulse of *sensuality*. Niebuhr states, "…he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing himself into a 'mutable good,' by losing himself in some natural vitality."[652] In this mode of salvation, Mumford forsakes the human's ability to enact change in the

[649] NDHN, P. 17.
[650] SOU, P. 22-23.
[651] NDHN, P. 95.
[652] Ibid., P. 186.

technological society in one's current state, and in so doing, he obscures the technological society as one that appears incalcitrant, hopeless, and irredeemable.

This process of obscuring the technological society so that it seems utterly irredeemable is built on the presumption that the Megamachine harbors within it possessive powers of psychological manipulation. Mumford presumes that whatever is evil about the technological society is not a result of human will, but rather a closed system of increasing psychological defect: the human's defect of mechanical thinking causes the Megamachine, which causes more of the defect which produces mechanical thinking. However, it is unclear how Mumford believes that simply withdrawing from society can cause the kind of re-orientation necessary to allow the human to return to society without the need for clocks, science, or capital, which are necessarily wed to the technological society. Does simply withdrawing more somehow disrupt the psychological effects of time-keeping, science, and capital? This suggestion not only seems unrealistic, but it is more a retreat from evil than it is an ethic of technology.

Regarding his *rationalistic* project of utilizing a new myth of organic balance to reinstitute an appropriate consciousness of self, Mumford evades responsibility by way of what Niebuhr identifies as the impulse of *pride*. Niebuhr states, "Man falls into pride when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance."[653] Mumford clearly places an unrealistic hope in human imagination, or what he calls, "the idola." He states, "So far we have found no limits to the imagination, nor yet to the sources on which it may draw. Every goal man reaches provides a new starting point, and the sum of all man's days is just a beginning."[654] The problem is that, ironically, though his ideal which uses natural language, he does not see the

[653] Ibid.
[654] TOM, P. 192.

natural contingencies and limitations that necessarily imperil his highest values. The human is not responsible for the evil effects of the technological society; the human is its very salvation.

In keeping with his easy conscience, Mumford believes that the key to overturning the myth of the machine is believing more in one's good original self by way of a myth that is more consistent with organic balance. Mumford argues that myths are the "…ideal content of the existing order of things…by being consciously formulated and worked out in thought…[myths] perpetuate and perfect that order."[655] Believe in the happier and more balanced myth, and the dehumanizing structures of the Megamachine come crashing down. However, opposite his posture when proposing psychological re-orientation, Mumford is not considering the limitations of human transcendence—one's reason and ideology—and, in so doing, he obscures the technological society as one that is manageable, changeable, and bendable towards one's predetermined harmony of nature.

Whether Mumford is advocating for escaping the technological society or overtaking the technological society with a greater governing myth, his original self and his ideal self are fundamentally indistinguishable as ideas; both champion organic balance, and both represent for Mumford a wholeness, subjectivity, and freedom that he sees as clashing with the Megamachine. Furthermore, the ethical prescriptions for the self that he puts forward amount simply to reflecting more on the latter so as to become more like the former, be it through withdrawal or transvaluating culture through its alternative myth. For Mumford, what is fundamentally wrong with society is simply a pattern of habits formed in ignorance of organic balance. For all intents and purposes, Mumford's view of sin is naivete: a problem that is self-correctible and hardly the fault of the individual. Therefore, in Niebuhrian terms, Mumford effectively betrays the uneasy

[655] SOU, P. 194.

conscience by pretending the only resolution for humankind is found in an idealized future that has not yet emerged, or an idealized past that one can never fully revive.[656]

In opposition to Mumford, Niebuhr argues, "Ultimate confidence in the goodness of life can…not rest upon confidence in the goodness of man."[657] Effectively, there is a fundamental tension between what humans can imagine and what humans can realistically achieve; whether that is an idealistic view of the past or a naively optimistic view of the future. As previously established, the tension between human imagination and human action is one that Mumford completely ignores.

While the final chapter will argue that Mumford is at least partially correct in his diagnosis of the technological society as a problem of mythology, the kind of myth he suggests in its place—one that contains the "ideal content of the existing order of things"—is inherently problematic, as it simply supports a new illusion in the place of the old one. Instead, Niebuhr's use of myth and religion will be particularly useful, as it is a revelation, not simply of unachievable ideals, but a revelation that clarifies reality in a way that exposes its fullest dimension.

In what seems to be a direct critique of Mumford's understanding of myth, Niebuhr states, "Religion, declares the modern man, is consciousness of our highest social values. Nothing could be further from the truth. True religion is a profound uneasiness about our highest social values."[658] For Niebuhr, the purpose of myth is to clarify the limitations and ambiguities of life and to instruct the human how best to live within the parameters of those limitations and

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[656] In his article, "Lewis Mumford and the Organicist Concept in Social Thought" (*Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 53, 1992. P. 115), Robert Casillo cogently argues that one cannot physically withdraw from the Megamachine when it is composed strictly as an archetype or idea.
[657] BTR, P. 131.
[658] Ibid., P. 28.

ambiguities, as opposed to obscuring the self by its self-aggrandizing illusions. Ultimately, from Niebuhr's perspective, Mumford does not understand that when he imagines the human as being greater than he or she is and forsakes the human being's unremitting complicity in the evil of the world, he also robs the human of one's ability to improve the world through a heightened awareness of one's involvement in both human achievement and human failure.

In one of his rare critiques of Mumford, Niebuhr states that Mumford "dismissed the religious myths a little too readily…."[659] He argues that Mumford had taken upon himself the task of creating new "scientifically informed" myths, but unjustifiably looked over the more timeless teachings of the religiously-informed myths. While Niebuhr remains vague about what those "religious myths" are, it can be reasonably assumed that is speaking about the Judeo-Christian stories which inform the human of one's own nature and self. It should be mentioned, however, that it is curious that Mumford disregards the Judeo-Christian myths so readily as he turns to generate new myths of counteracting the Megamachine, as Mumford himself at times points towards these myths in particular as those which granted grounds of resistance and dimension to self during the reigns of ancient Egypt and the Roman empire.[660]

A. Anxiety in the Self

As established in Chapter 3, anxiety is an inevitable concomitant to the human situation. The human, endowed with seemingly infinite capacities of imagination and spirit, can never fully translate that which it can imagine into the finite realm of existence. While certain thinkers, Mumford included, may assuage the conscience by its elaborate constructions of self to create

[659] Niebuhr, "Our Machine Made Culture" in *Christendom* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Autumn 1935), P. 186.
[660] Regarding Judaism, see: MOM, P. 232-233; regarding Christianity, see: COM, P. 61-71. For both, Mumford praises and then quickly moves on, but never clearly addresses why he feels that neither of these religious traditions are viable lenses through which one may understand the technological society.

the easy conscience, anxiety can never fully be assuaged. In fact, this section will demonstrate how Mumford's anthropology—his expression of an easy conscience—compounds anxiety through his premature solutions regarding the problems of self.

What will unfold throughout Mumford's career is in many ways a case-study for Niebuhr's Christian conception of human nature, in that Mumford's career represents a predictive model for one who is anxiously resigned to his optimistic position. Mumford cannot "determine whether he shall understand himself primarily from the standpoint of the uniqueness of his reason or from the standpoint of his affinity with nature,"[661] and this confusion leads Mumford to seek resolution after resolution in hopes of aligning the self with an illusory sense of unity that is not permitted by either presupposition. Ultimately, Mumford's easy conscience and presumptions regarding technological neutrality on the one hand, and his harrowing description of a possessive, psychologically manipulating technological society on the other, compounds anxiety in a way that creates an endless complex of hopeful paralysis.

In opposition to Mumford's frictionless, Jungian construction of self, Niebuhr argues that the self is plagued by its own homelessness.[662] The human is neither one with reason or creativity, nor is the human ever fully unified with nature; the human can imagine that which is infinite and complete, but must be anchored in that which is finite and perceivably incomplete. Given the human being's homelessness, that he or she is never at home within nature or reason, "anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved."[663] The human suffers from anxiety so long as he or she is tempted to do and be what the human simply cannot do or become. Therefore, the human is never resolved enough to move

[661] NDHN, P. 21.
[662] Ibid., P. 1.
[663] Ibid., P. 182.

past the self in an effort to establish one's own form of salvation, either from the position of rationality or from the position of nature or history.

However, as in the case of Mumford, the human is invariably "tempted"[664] to "[aggrevate] that problem by his too simple and premature solutions" to the inherent tensions of self.[665] In other words, the anxiety concomitant to the human condition of homelessness tempts the human to transcend the homeless state in order to save him or herself from it. Describing self-consciousness as if it were a "high tower looking upon a large and inclusive world," Niebuhr states, "[the human] imagines that it is the large world which it beholds and not a narrow tower insecurely erected amidst the shifting sands of the world."[666] The anxious human resolves what cannot be resolved (shifting sands) by assuming a higher perspective than one's nature grants.

Regarding Mumford, his difficulty in locating the salvific avenues of humanity reveals the inherent anxiety of his work. He is determined to keep reaching for a rational or creative unity that betrays the reality of the human condition. His central goal of creating an "ideology so profoundly organic that it will be capable of bringing together the severed halves of modern man…"[667] presumes a view of self that is in stark contrast to one's fractured nature; a human so easily solvable that one's very thoughts can cure him or herself.

However, this construction leads to Mumford's perennial angst. Near the end of his life when it dawns on Mumford that no salvation of organicism is near and the prospects for such a totalizing makeover of society become increasingly remote, Mumford is confronted with the anxiety that is inevitable to the human condition; he is left within a paralyzing anxiety that is

[664] Ibid.
[665] Ibid., P. 4.
[666] Ibid., P. 17.
[667] SOU, P. 22-23.

intensified by a perfection which he can imagine, but a perfection he is doubtful the world can ever achieve.

At the center of Mumford's error is his inability to attribute the problems of humankind to the inherent tensions and freedom of the self. Mumford confuses the endless battle at the core of the human condition with an illusory battle of rationality and creativity against the Megamachine. The moment he commits this error is when he locates the problem of modern technics within an independent realm of ideas as opposed to within human nature itself.[668]

By ignoring the inner tensions inherent to human freedom and placing human consciousness at the center of the realm of meaning, Mumford grants unlimited power for the human to use symbols and ideas to "transcend his immediate environment" and improve the world, culture, and society through the process of intellection and creativity,[669] *but in so doing*—by granting such power to human rationality and creativity—Mumford also creates the possibility of enslaving oneself by the same all-powerful consciousness. Therefore, all of what Mumford perceives as good and evil is invariably absorbed into a rationalistic framework—a certain type of thinking over and against another type of thinking. Ultimately, this leads to Mumford cornering himself into a cul-de-sac of Manichaeism, where one must either be saved through right reason (organic balance) or doomed by wrong reason (mechanistic thinking). [670]

Essentially, by establishing the easy conscience and obscuring the limitations and weaknesses inherent to humanity, Mumford's criticism of the technological society is compounded in a labyrinth of mutually inflating oppositional forces. Mumford sees the human as so powerful in one's consciousness that, essentially, anything that can co-opt that power and

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[668] See SOU, Chapter 1.
[669] MOM, P. 30.
[670] In his work, *The Mechanical Bride* (New York, NY: Vanguard Press, 1951. P. 34), Marshall McLuhan, argues that Mumford conceals in his work "…the dubious assumption that the organic is the opposite of the mechanical."

force it into submission would be equally powerful. Effectively, *the Megamachine is so utterly powerful precisely because human consciousness is so utterly powerful.* Therefore, any salvation plan that Mumford could articulate is necessarily tasked to become that much greater than the Megamachine the humans create. To effectively fix the problems of the Megamachine, the human must achieve a greater and more holistic consciousness than ever achieved before.

One of the driving forces behind this Manichean struggle of warring ideals is Mumford's conflicting sentiments of humanism and romanticism that are infused both in his worldview and occupation as a critic.[671] His humanism establishes an unjustified faith in humanity and tempts him to grant unlimited powers to the human through the unconscious powers of the idolum, but his romanticism requires an unrelenting assault upon industrialized civilization and tempts him to despair the technological and scientific projects of humankind.[672] These sentiments further establish and compound his Manichean tendencies, as the more comprehensive his romantic critique is established, and the more ubiquitous technologically appears, the more Mumford must spiritualize his humanism, and by extension, his high estimation of humankind in order to find

[671] In his autobiography (MWD, P. 430), Mumford speaks of irresolvable binaries even within himself that all loosely apply to his humanism and romanticism divide. He speaks of a "block" between his "outer life" and his "inner life," and how his creativity is "a third more than my actual productivity." This self-admission is actually quite consistent with his more philosophical leanings, in that he regularly grants prescriptions from his imagination that simply cannot be fully actualized in reality. Mumford is essentially experiencing a divide between his aspirations and what he can actually attain. This is a problem he effectively attempts to resolve through his romanticism. In his article, "Tragedy, Responsibility, and the American Intellectual: 1925-1950" (*Hughes & Hughes*, P. 325) Fox rightly identifies the gulf between ideal and limitations in Mumford's thought and points to his romanticism as his mode of granting the self transcendence within the mechanistic world to establish his humanistic optimism for humanity. He states, "…Mumford…offered somber meditations on the ineradicable limits to human happiness. There was an unbreachable gap between human aspiration and human attainment, a deep-seated dissatisfaction at the center of life…. Mumford tried to go beyond…by embracing the Romantic quest for transcendence…"

[672] It is important to note that later in his career, Mumford increasingly equates science with the myth of the machine and, by extension, the Megamachine. This appears to be due to his increasingly dualistic approach to society. In his article, "The Primacy of Science in Modernity, of Technology in Postmodernity, and of Ideology in the History of Technology" (*History and Technology* Vol. 23, No. 1/2, Marche/June 2007, P. 43), Paul Foreman notes that "Mumford's view of science changed drastically in the following decades" to the point of "antipathy."

salvation. The more he sees the Megamachine as unconquerable and ubiquitous, the more his prescriptions must become idealized and spiritually extracted from the world.

Mumford's final articulation of the technological society is anxious because he is compelled to articulate a harrowing and unsalvageable world while maintaining a high estimation of self. His high estimation of self and his increasingly monstrous depiction of the Megamachine lead Mumford towards an unending oscillation between extremes. A revealing example of this oscillation between extremes can be found in his response to the growing arms race with the Soviet Union during the Cold War: Is this a dream? Naturally, it is a dream, for all challenges to animal lethargy and inertia begin in a dream. The dream of flight eventually produced the airplane, and the dream of brotherhood will bring forth…an effective world government. *But it is better to sink one's last hopes in a dream than to be destroyed by a nightmare*…."[673] Consistent with his Manichean worldview, Mumford begins with a high estimation of self—that one can simply dream and thus provide the "engine" for change—but ends his analysis in a bitter ultimatum: one must dream, lest he or she be "destroyed by a nightmare."

Mumford's ultimatum as one that is necessarily tied to his organic versus mechanistic Manichaeism is invariably expressed through an all-or-nothing ethic which is as condemning as it is unrealistic. This tendency mirrors his bilateral approach to salvation from the Megamachine: either leave, overcome the mythology, or some combination of the two. He most starkly expresses this tendency also in his essay, "The Art of the Impossible," where he states that humanity "…must either bring about an *open world* or perish within a closed world."[674]

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[673] Mumford, *In the Name of Sanity* (New York, NY, Harcourt and Brace, 1954), P. 9. Emphasis added.
[674] Lewis Mumford, "The Art of the 'Impossible'," in *Alternatives to the H-Bomb*, Anatole Shub (ed.), (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955. P. 29.

From the Niebuhrian perspective, such an ultimatum—that the future of the world and human existence is contingent upon the world becoming "open" or democratic—is at once an *overestimation* of human capacity by his implicit belief that the entire world can indeed become "open," and an *underestimation* of the human's capacity to progress in spite of its limitations, which is explicit in his clearly expressed ultimatum.[675]

In a rare published critique of Mumford, Niebuhr addresses his Manichaeistic and unrealistic approach to the nuclear age, and does so in a way that reveals the difference between the two thinkers. Niebuhr states, "Mr. Mumford's prescription…would seem to be analogous to advising [that] 'You haven't a chance to escape disaster by walking on the edge of the precipice. Your only chance is to fly. I know you haven't any wings, but you must sprout them. The impossible must become possible in extreme situations.[676] While this statement is in the context of nuclear age foreign policy, it implicitly supports the position that Niebuhr's approach to ethics is one that is centered upon the realistic limitations and capabilities of human beings, and aids as a further indictment of Mumford regarding his Manichean approach to the problems of the technological society that is created by his high-estimation of self. Mumford is essentially calling on the human to achieve the impossible in order to avert disaster, which is unrealistic by its own admission.

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[675] For perspective, Mumford never could have advocated for what Niebuhr fought for in the nuclear age, and that is the United States' "containment strategy" (also known as the Truman doctrine) which is considered "…a middle ground between…the extremes of pacifism and preemptive war…." For more on Niebuhr's support for the containment policy and how it relates to today, see Robert B. Horwitz, "The Revival of Reinhold Niebuhr: A Foreign Policy Fable," in *Public Culture* Vol. 28, Number 1 (2015). Quotation is taken from P. 117.

[676] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Review of *In the Name of Sanity*," *New York Times Book Review* (26 September 1954), P. 31.

Mumford's anxiety is at last expressed in the bitter pessimism[677] that would develop from his Manichean view of the technological problem, but it is important to understand that this pessimism is the direct result of Mumford's high estimation of humankind, thereby placing the human under the burden of perfection.[678] In his final major work, Mumford states an ultimatum in its most all-encompassing form: essentially, the only way humanity can be saved from the Megamachine is by experiencing a near-mystical, religious revolution.[679] Mumford states, "For its effective salvation mankind will need to undergo something like a spontaneous religious conversion: one that will replace the mechanical world picture with an organic world picture, and give to the human personality, as the highest known manifestation of life, the precedence it now gives to its machines and computers."[680] In this concluding analysis, which is found in the closing pages of his final major work, *The Pentagon of Power*, Mumford is at once surrendering to the Megamachine *and* positing one final leap of faith into a mystical hope of a coming eschatological event. Absent such an event, there is essentially no hope. Despite whatever dreams may have for a spontaneous conversion to the organic, it appears that the dualistic struggle that Mumford imagined taking place between the organic and mechanistic ideals would end, at least in his mind, in the defeat of the organic world. In a letter he writes late in his life,

[677] In his review of Mumford's *Myth of the Machine* (*New York Times Book Review*, April 1967, P. 1), Edmund Carpenter calls the work "dogmatic, petulant and out of date" and characterizes Mumford as "…an old man annoyed with his grandchildren."
[678] In his review of Mumford's *Conduct of Life* (*New Yorker* Vol. 27, 24 November 1951), Lionel Trilling rightly argues, "[Mumford] tells us that we cannot possibly save civilized society unless we become perfect men and acquire every good quality men could possibly have."
[679] Salvador Giner and David Tábara state, "…for Lewis Mumford, the total collapse of the planet will only be avoided if an organic, all-embracing worldview of life…is adopted and understood by the majority of the world in an almost religious way." ("Cosmic Piety and Ecological Rationality" *International Sociology* Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1999, P. 69)
[680] POP, P. 413.

Mumford ominously reflects, "I have not the heart to tell [people]…what I actually think about our human prospects…unless something approaching a miracle takes place…."[681]

Regarding his critique against both Romanticism and the humanist notes that invariably find prominence in its full expression, Niebuhr argues that Romantic "pessimism" is indicative "…of the despair which modern man faces when his optimistic illusions are dispelled."[682] By ignoring human limitation by way of fantasies of human creativity and power, Mumford is bound to recognize the "obvious fact" of human limitation.[683] Niebuhr states:

> The fact is that man is never unconscious of his weakness, of the limited and dependent character of his existence and knowledge. The occasion for his temptation lies in the two facts, his greatness and his weakness…taken together…. He stands at the juncture of nature and spirit; and is involved in both freedom and necessity. His sin is…always partly an effort to obscure his blindness by overestimating the degree of his sight and to obscure his insecurity by stretching his power beyond its limits.[684]

From the Niebuhrian perspective, human weakness is always presently intelligible, but Mumford's illusions regarding his high-estimation of human nature obscures the tensions between human ambition and real human capacity, culminating in Mumford falsely despairing the latter when failure seizes the former.

Moreover, the Niebuhrian view of human nature reveals a deep irony at the center of Mumford's work that further compounds his latter-day anxieties. According to Niebuhr, there is a direct relationship between ambition and the awareness of one's limitations. Niebuhr states:

> The fact that human ambitions know no limits must therefore be attributed not merely to the infinite capacities of the human imagination but to an uneasy recognition of man's finiteness, weakness and dependence, which become more apparent the more we seek to obscure them, and which generate ultimate perils, the more immediate insecurities are eliminated.[685]

Essentially, as applied to Mumford, the more he attempts to escape the Megamachine, the more fully he reveals his own limitations. This is why Mumford appears to move from prescriptions

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[681] Letter from Mumford to Bruno Zevi, manuscript quoted in Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford Reader*, P. 302.
[682] NDHN P. 121.
[683] Ibid., P. 3.
[684] Ibid., P. 181.
[685] Ibid., P. 223.

for personal responsibility and practicality earlier in his career, to the more eschatological and mystical hope he exposits later in his career. The growing incongruity between Mumford's ambitions and his limitations flatten the human the more he tries to grant it dimension. The more he asks of humanity, the more clearly the human's limitations are revealed, the more monstrous the mechanistic society then appears, and the more he again must ask of humanity. This cycle continues until the task appears overwhelmingly impossible near the end of his life, and he must rely upon that which is otherworldly, spiritual, and eschatological to save humanity.

Effectively, Mumford's pessimism is caused by ambitions that are outrunning his limitations. He does not see—or refuses to see—that his optimism and high-estimation of human nature is directly causing his pessimism, lending special credence to Michael Zuckerman's description of Mumford's latter career: "…he disdains the conclusions to which his intellect impels him."[686] To state it in another way, Mumford's pessimism is directly the result of his overly optimistic view of human nature. Mumford simply does not see that the more faith he has in humanity, the more he is ultimately let down by humanity.

It should be noted that despite how prolific and how grand a story Mumford tells, the issues Niebuhr would have with his work are really quite basic to all humanity. At any given point, it is possible for Mumford to recognize the tensions within the self that expose the ironic relationship between human limitation and human capacity. In fact, the following statement from Mumford, if placed without qualification at the center of his thought, may have tempered his ambitions and clarified his understanding of human nature enough to withstand the temptations of both optimism and pessimism: "Man's reason now informs him that even in his most inspired moments he is but a participating agent in a larger cosmic process he did not

[686] Zuckerman, Hughes & Hughes, P. 376.

originate and can only in the most limited fashion control. Except through the expansion of his consciousness, his littleness and his loneliness remain real."[687] In this statement, Mumford affirms what is most apparent to Niebuhr: the inner tensions of self; that the greater the arena of human understanding, the more revealed also is one's limitations and weaknesses. As in the Fall, knowledge will always lead to the revelation of nakedness. However, Mumford prematurely resolves this "littleness and loneliness" by absorbing the self into a rationalistic depiction of nature and collective consciousness, thus deadening the import of his claim, and readying the human for ambitions beyond one's capabilities in the form of a quixotic Platonic mission of discovering "…an ideology so profoundly organic that it will be capable of bringing together the severed halves of modern man."[688] Mumford betrays the tensions he himself observed in order to empower the human, yet he ironically only reveals a clearer picture of human limitation.

From Niebuhr's perspective, Mumford's pessimistic turn in his later life is less of a failure of Mumford or human kind in the grips of a technological society, but should rather be seen more as a clarifying moment; one which illuminates the uneasy conscience at the heart of the human condition, and yet remains concealed by Mumford's optimistic illusions regarding the self. What is waiting for Mumford near the end of his career is not an answer to the problems of the technological society, but rather the realities of the human condition, clearly expressed in Niebuhr's understanding of Original Sin: "…that thing about man which makes him capable of conceiving of his own perfection and incapable of achieving it."[689] Instead of finding this realization and discovering serenity within it, Mumford tirelessly peers through his Platonically

[687] MOM, P. 34.
[688] SOU, P. 22-23.
[689] IAH, P. 84.

conceived hope of actualizing those dreams which can only be imagined, and therefore Mumford remains in his paralyzing angst until the bitter end.[690]

The final irony for Mumford is that through the course of his criticism of the myth of the machine—criticism for its reductionist and abstract impositions upon nature and human beings—Mumford in response creates perhaps the ultimate abstract reality, imposed upon the world and self by way of a most reductionistic dualism (organicism v. mechanism).[691] In his attempt to break his bondage to modern technics and the Megamachine, Mumford creates a new world under which he is imprisoned. Mumford flattens the self into a binary in his very attempt to grant it dimension.

Though he grants invaluable insights regarding the technological society, Mumford's career is a cautionary tale to those who attempt to elevate the human beyond the human's capacity to achieve; self-transcendence is not discoverable in actualizing its highest ideals over and against human society, but by clarifying the human condition, and maintaining the tensions within, which so clearly constrain, yet empower the human towards proximal solutions. It is for this reason that Niebuhr finds within the Christian faith the most revelatory perspective of human nature:

> Without the presuppositions of the Christian faith the individual is either nothing or becomes everything. In the Christian faith man's insignificance as a creature, involved in the process of nature and time, is lifted into significance by the mercy and power of God in which his life is sustained. But his significance as a free spirit is understood as subordinate to the freedom of God. His inclination to abuse his freedom, to overestimate his power and significance and to become everything is understood as the primal sin. It is

[690] In his essay, "The Myth of the Machine" (Hughes & Hughes, P. 163), Miller draws a metaphor quite fitting to both Mumford's taste and his latter-day struggles to maintain optimism by alluding to the great work, *Moby Dick*, written by one of Mumford's hero's, Herman Melville. Miller states, "Still, we must remember that on the sinking whaler in Melville's *Moby Dick* the last touch is Tashtego's arm nailing a flag to the mast. That is Lewis Mumford, [at the age of] 75. The optimism of his old age is almost a cry of defiance. I will not give in! Mankind will not give in—no matter how impossible the odds!" For a similar analogy regarding Mumford and Melville, see: Frank Novak, *The Autobiographical Writings of Lewis Mumford* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. P. 4-5).

[691] In his work, *The Mechanical Bride* (New York, NY: Vanguard Press, 1951. P. 34), Marshall McLuhan, argues that Mumford conceals in his work "…the dubious assumption that the organic is the opposite of the mechanical."

> because man is inevitably involved in this primal sin that he is bound to meet God first of all as a judge, who humbles his pride and brings his vain imagination to naught.[692]

According to Niebuhr, the Christian view of self is vital for the realization of how one should operate within contemporary society, for it is within the limitations and tensions which the Christian faith reveals that one might find the full dimension of the self.

[692] NDHN, P. 92.

Chapter 6: Herbert Marcuse and the Easy Conscience

Introduction

The present chapter will repeat the prophetic methodology utilized in the previous two chapters, but instead will switch focus to Herbert Marcuse. Specifically, this chapter will show how Marcuse's anthropology expresses itself as an easy conscience. Ultimately, this chapter is to support the primary goal of this thesis, which is to construct a synthesis of the work of Niebuhr, Mumford, and Marcuse in order to create a new type of technological engagement from the basis of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology.

In keeping with the goal of this chapter, this chapter will do three things. First, (I) this chapter will introduce Marcuse's background as derived from the Frankfurt School, which is also Critical Theory's place of origin. Second, (II) this chapter will analyze Marcuse's anthropology, with special attention to how it contrasts with that of Niebuhr's. Finally, (III) this chapter will conclude by arguing that Marcuse's anthropology expresses itself as an easy conscience, thus rendering ethical responsibility in the technological society problematic.

I: Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

Critical Theory's genesis is ultimately traced to the Frankfurt School (also known as the Institute of Social Research), and in particular can be traced to an essay written by the director of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer.[693] In his essay, *Traditional and Critical Theory*, Horkheimer argues for a bold move away from the traditional Marxist-Hegelian goals of *understanding* society and culture, and instead towards a much greater emphasis on the *critique*

[693] Raphael Schlembach, "Negation, Refusal and Co-Optation: The Frankfurt School and Social Movement Theory," *Sociology Compass* Vol. 9 (28 October, 2015): P. 988.

of society and culture, exposing contradictions within capitalism and the misery Horkheimer saw as concomitant to industry and commercialization.[694] Ultimately, it was Horkheimer's goal to guide the Frankfurt School in the direction of becoming "…a critical, promotive factor in the development of the masses."[695]

The move from a more descriptive role in society to that of a critic or 'shaper' of society was the result of a confluence of events and influences that would serve as the philosophical foundation for both the Frankfurt School and Marcuse, as well as their ultimate goals going forward. This section will detail the thought of three individuals who would lay the groundwork for Critical Theory as it developed within the Frankfurt School, and then demonstrate these thinkers as the basis for Marcuse's perspective on the self, society, and technology. The three individuals covered in this section are (A) Karl Marx, (B) Max Weber, and (C) Georg Lukács, and this section will conclude (D) by showing Marcuse's continuity with these thinkers as a main interlocutor for this thesis.

A. Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School

Marx is without question the single most important driving force behind the Frankfurt School. Long before the Frankfurt School would become synonymous with Critical Theory, the institute was established by philanthropist, Hermann Weil, with the central aim of taking "…an avowedly Marxist perspective on economic and social questions."[696] However, what had become apparent between the years of its inception in 1924 and the publication of Horkeimer's essay in 1937 were a number of "failures"—a number of reasons the Marxist project had to that

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[694] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory*"* in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays (*trans. by M.J. O'Connell, New York, NY, Herder and Herder, 1972), P. 188-243.
[695] Ibid, P. 214.
[696] James Schmidt, "The 'Eclipse of Reason' and the End of the Frankfurt School in America," *New German Critique*, no. 100 (2007): P. 50.

point stalled—that ultimately prompted Horkheimer to redirect the school towards the more suitable aims of social critique, rather than simply understanding and describing the social and historical trajectory. It is therefore discovered in the reasons *why* Marx apparently failed that the Frankfurt School sought a new direction, seeking the outside influence and social critiques of Weber and Lukács to better articulate a way forward, while still also maintaining a number of Marxist directives, convictions, and concepts at its core.

The aim of this subsection is to show Karl Marx's influence on the Frankfurt School by detailing (1) the Marxist tenets that would remain central, while also (2) demonstrating the failures that necessitated the school to change course. Both sections will show the Marx still within Marcuse, and thus set a framework for a Niebuhrian analysis of Marcuse's uniquely constructed Marxist anthropology. This section will conclude (3) with a summary regarding how Marx is generally used by the Frankfurt School

1. Central Marxist Components

The first and most overt Marxist component central to Critical Theory's project is the shared ultimate goal to liberate the proletariat from the economic and social controls of the bourgeoisie, who oppress the proletariat primarily through the alienation of their labor and ultimately their dehumanization. This much is clearly present from one of the very first projects undertaken by the Frankfurt School,[697] to the very last major publication by Marcuse.[698] As will

[697] In *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1931* (trans. Michael Shaw, New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978. P. 62), Horkheimer discusses one of the Frankfurt School's earliest research projects, which attempted to ascertain the German working class's "capacity for education and organization." Though he regretted the apparent findings, the Frankfurt School from its inception had the primary goal, the concrete goal of liberating the working class from the bourgeoisie.

[698] In *The Aesthetic Dimension, Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978. P. 46), Marcuse, states, "Art is…the promise of liberation…. The promise is wrested from the established [bourgeois] reality."

be revealed in the next section (2), this central goal remains untouched in the Frankfurt School, but will be expressed in new dimensions and avenues in their now transformed view of society; namely, that of a technological society, enamored with new distractions and engrossed in new challenges for the Marxist to expose and address. This central concern is not unlike Niebuhr's central concern of sin, in that "Each new century originates a new complexity and each new generation faces a new vexation in it;"[699] while Niebuhr sought to uncover new expressions of sin within these new complexities, the Marxist is called to address those old categories of class struggle within a new language that more accurately reflects the current proletarian condition within a technological society.[700]

The next concept that will remain central is Marx's synthesis of Ludwig Feuerbach and G.W.F. Hegel to create what is known as "historical materialism." Most extensively articulated in his essay, "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General," Marx synthesizes a new view of Hegel's dialectical history that incorporates Feuerbach's negation of spirit, metaphysics, religion, and philosophy to create a unified theory of history that depicts truth as "not only an attribute of thought, but of reality in process."[701] In other words, truth is a cognitive extension of reality in the mind of the subject that transcends history by understanding it.

To the critical theorist, all language is to be directly referential to the historical-material world, and warned against language becoming "…abstracted from the ongoing historical

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[699]MMIS, P. 1.
[700] Commenting on this "new critical theory," in his introduction to *The Essential Frankfurt School* (ed. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt, New York, NY: Continuum Publishing, 1997. P. 11), Andrew Arato explains the new form of class struggle Critical Theory addresses, yet still very firmly within the Marxist tradition: "The new critical theory discovered itself in a historical context where the domination of men over men and (a new Frankfurt theme) over nature was justified or veiled by no traditional or even old bourgeois ideals but only by technical efficiency."
[701] RAR, P. 25.

process."[702] The critical theorists take seriously the idea that their work is intimately connected to and firmly anchored within the reality they seek to change—or perhaps preferably stated, the historical process they seek to reveal or unfold. While there remain differences of opinion on how exactly Marx's materialism is to be understood,[703] there is a very firm understanding that what critical theorists are doing is a part of the grounded, necessary historical process; it is to, as Hegel put it, "concern itself only with the glory of the Idea mirroring itself in the History of the World."[704]

Among the more pertinent implications of Marx's historical materialism springs from the critical theorist's linguistic fidelity towards material history even while articulating self-consciousness. "Consciousness…" Marx proclaims, "…does not determine life, but life determines consciousness."[705] For both Marx and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, the problem of subject/object in relation to the self will prove a precarious one. If the self is above the historical process, the self is by definition immaterial, and therefore one is incapable of speaking of the self while remaining faithful to a materialistic orientation towards reality. However, if the self is purely an object, a product of nature and the historical process, this makes change impossible except by the socio-historical process.

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[702] Eike Gebhardt, "Critique of Methodology," in *The Essential Frankfurt School* (ed. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt, New York, NY: Continuum Publishing, 1997), P. 399.
[703] In his book, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1967. P. 26) Z.A. Jordan argues that due to Marx's dismissal of ontological terms in favor of "social and historical" assumptions, "they should not be regarded as materialism in the accepted sense of the world." Jordan much prefers the label of "naturalist" for Marx.
[704] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1956), P. 457.
[705] Karl Marx, "The German Ideology Part I" in *Selected Writings* (ed. Lawrence H. Simon, trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994), P. 112.

There are times within Critical Theory that the individual is perceived overwhelmingly as an object; a victim of historical process, economic systems, and power.[706] At best, the individual, as Marcuse articulates, maintains a "determinate choice" within history, paradoxically maintaining both the fruits of the subjective and objective forms of self simultaneously.[707] However, at the base of Marxist understanding, one must begin from a state of "non-identity" and any unity between subject and object in the self is "symptomatic of 'naive' consciousness," therefore, "the experience of non-identity between these two spheres (i.e. in the final analysis, of subject and object) [is] the starting point, and its admission a matter of intellectual integrity."[708]

Ultimately, regardless of the problem of self, both for Marx and the critical theorist, what must exist is a Hegelian dialectic of time where the process of *conflicting ideas* is pressing human beings towards the reality of ultimate freedom. "Thought is the vehicle of this process," Marcuse states, "The individuals become conscious of their potentialities and organize their relations in accordance with their reason…the free rationality of thought must come into conflict with the rationalizations of the given order of life. Hegel saw in this process a general law of history, as unalterable as time itself."[709] What once was to Hegel the "realization of the Spirit…the justification of God in History,"[710] is to the Marxist materialist the complete manifestation of human liberation. For all involved—Hegel, Marx, the Frankfurt School—

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[706] In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989. P. 506), Charles Taylor frames the trajectory of the Frankfurt School as highly pessimistic, portraying the individual so objectively, so vulnerable to history, that there is no turning back. Commenting on one of the Frankfurt School's own, Theodor Adorno, Taylor states, "Indeed, it appears almost as if Adorno saw the human problem as insoluble in history."
[707] ODM, P. 221.
[708] Gebhardt, P. 400-401.
[709] RAR, P. 239.
[710] Hegel, P. 457.

history progresses only through the conflict of ideas that are rooted in reality. Marcuse states, "No power whatsoever could, in the long run, stop the march of thought."[711] The process of conflicting ideas over time is the means by which the proletariat is freed—a central idea both Marx and the Frankfurt School share.

The Marxist components central to the Frankfurt School are (1) the goal for the proletariat to be freed from bourgeois control—united again with one's work, (2) the materialistic composition of the world and all human beings, (3) rational fidelity to that material world, (4) the subject/object problem within materialism, and (5) the Marxist dialectic of history which necessarily leads to the liberation of humankind. These five Marxist influences will continue to form the basis of their critiques and reconstruction efforts. While there are scholars who question the Frankfurt School's ultimate loyalty to Marx,[712] these five features are undeniably represented in the body of their publications.

2. The Failures and Reinvention of Marx in the Frankfurt School

Along with the Marxist influences within the Frankfurt School come a number of Marxist failures that will at once alarm the early-to-mid 20th century Marxist, and yet provide space to adapt. The following "failures" will show how the Frankfurt School, and by extension Marcuse, evolved the Marxist project alongside a number of new challenges. For the purposes of Niebuhr's dialogue with Marcuse, this section will show the non-Marxist philosophical foundation that Niebuhr must also confront.

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[711] RAR, P. 239.

[712] In Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1973/1996. P. 57), Jay recalls a conversation with Adorno where Adorno stated disparagingly, "Marx wanted to turn the whole world into a giant workhouse." On the other hand, Gerhsom Scholem stated quite equivocally, "Critical Theory was…a code word…for Marxism, nothing more (Martin Jay, *Refractions of Violence*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2003. P. 43)."

The first clear failure of Marxism in the 20th century, especially in the eyes of the Frankfurt School, was the failed German Revolution of 1917, and the subsequent dissolution of nations into authoritarian states. On the one hand, the once praised Soviet Union was assuming larger control of the German Communist Party, displaying "suspicious" inclinations towards "dictatorship" with its "Stalinist trials and prison camps."[713] On the other hand, and most alarming to the Frankfurt School, was the rise of fascism. To understand the motives for the Frankfurt School, the response to the National Socialist party cannot be overstated. Kellner states:

> The triumph of fascism in central and southern Europe and the barbarism of the Second World War seemed to refute the optimistic elements in the Marxian theory of history that saw inexorable progress towards socialism as the direction of history. Instead of socialism, a pseudo-revolutionary fascist movement gained power, and the working class suffered fascist domination while again being sacrificed in a murderous war. The regressive nature of fascism put in question the Marxian theory of history and revolution, since it appeared that history was not progressing towards democratic socialism and the liberation of the working class.[714]

What was at stake in the rise of fascism was the entire Marxist conception of history and liberation. For the socialist-led German Revolution to fail and give way to a more totalizing and devastating form of dehumanization than before was a clear sign for the Frankfurt School that their former conceptions of history must be re-articulated in light of the alarming progress of dangerous new forms of rationality and politics. Perhaps just as puzzling to the Marxist perception of history, the entity which previously embodied their hopes for liberation and revolution, the Soviet Union, moved towards an alliance with fascism through its pact with Nazi Germany.[715]

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[713] Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984), P. 7.
[714] Ibid., P. 8.
[715] Ibid., P. 7.

Furthering the dismay of the still-Marxist Frankfurt School was the economic stabilization and overwhelming affluence of capitalist societies following World War II.[716] To witness these events unfold, from the victorious Russian Revolution along with the hope of a prospective global revolution, to now the rise of fascism in its place and global capitalism assuming more and more controls in the world economy, the Frankfurt Marxist cannot help but feel what Horkheimer laments: "…so close has truth come."[717] Kellner states, "In sum, Marxism seemed to have lost its moorings, no longer possessing its integrative practical and theoretical vision which could chart the course of historical development and give concrete political directives."[718]

Seemingly without a home within western academia, the Frankfurt School found a window for Marxist thought to flourish—ironically—from the ground of one of Marx's more overt failures. Marx reasoned that alienation is "not only inhumane but [is] also an obstacle to growth of the productive forces; therefore, the normative demand for a more humane society [is] congruent with the purely technical goal of increasing productivity."[719] With the rapid development of technology among the fascist and capitalist societies that surrounded them, and with special attention to their ever-increasing rates of production, the Frankfurt School was left to conclude that not only has production *increased* without humane treatment of workers, but there seems to be a correlation: increased production is occurring *because* of the alienation.[720]

To those in the Frankfurt School, one question becomes central: if alienation is now so pervasive in its most ruthless and dehumanizing form despite the unprecedented rise of

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[716] Ibid., P. 8.
[717] Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason" in *The Essential Frankfurt School*, P. 48.
[718] Kellner, P. 8.
[719] Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, P. 69.
[720] Feenberg, P. 69-70.

technological innovation, why is it that the workers are not revolting? Why has the Marxist dialectic failed? In his quest to find answers, Horkheimer conducted a study of the German working class a decade after the German Revolution and shortly before the rise of the Nazi Party. What he found was a largely disillusioned and distracted class of people. He states in his notes, "Unlike the prewar proletariat, *these* unemployed…do not possess the capacity for education and organization…Their impatience…is found, on an intellectual level, only in the mere repetition of Communist party slogans."[721] Impatient and lacking the capacity for education and organization, the workers appeared to be drifting towards a new vision of work; one that is based upon self-interest, growing more isolated and independent of one another. A new rationality seemed to be sweeping over the working class in the wake of its failed revolution.

This very early observation by Horkheimer will spark the beginning of a new form of Marxist thought that will examine the relationship between rationality and technology to decipher the new ways bourgeois society is apparently alienating the proletariat. To the Frankfurt School, the relationship between the working class and technology has become symbiotic, and many, not least Marcuse, will argue that technology pacifies the proletariat in ways not unlike Marx describes religion: technology itself has become "…the *opium* of the people."[722] The technological society would then become the focal point of Critical Theory. In the eyes of the Frankfurt School, technology is the reason the revolution never came, it is the reason the workers are happy when they should be furious, and it is the reason for the apparent

[721] Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, P. 62
[722] Original quote from Marx's "Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Selected Writings* (P. 28): "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."

"glitch" in the Marxist dialectic of history. The path to liberation is dependent upon the misery of the workers, and the workers are presently incapable of discontent.

3. Conclusion: Marx and Critical Theory

In conclusion, while several foundational Marxist concepts will remain central to the Frankfurt School—including the overall goals, materialism, and the historical dialectic—the notable failures of Marx in the events leading up to and following World War II caused a substantial shift in focus for the Frankfurt School. The failures proved alarming for the 20th century Marxist, as the proletariat now seemed incapable of seeking, or even desiring, their own liberation. However, the Frankfurt school would then discover within capitalist societies what seemed to be the ultimate pacification of its subjects: technology. What will then follow is the Frankfurt School's attempt to supplement their Marxist foundation with new ways to conceptualize the new technological society to better understand the current forms of oppression in hopes of recapturing the lost energies that once propelled the Marxist dialectic forward. They will turn to two thinkers who will prove highly significant for forming the new identity of the Frankfurt School: (B) Max Weber and (C) Georg Lukács.

B. Max Weber and the Frankfurt School

Karl Marx's views on technology were at best vague, and at worst contradicting.[723] Thus, to progress the Marxist discussion further within modern society following the apparent collapse of the Marxist dialectic, the Frankfurt School had to incorporate an additional critique of the technological society that would prove strong enough to explain the extinguished

[723] Feenberg: "There are so many ambiguities in Marx's writings on technology that both positions can find support there. These ambiguities are due to his occasional attempts to fend off charges of romanticism with a naive instrumentalist account of technology. Thus he carefully limited his criticism to the 'bad use' of machinery…." (P. 31)

revolutionary energies of the proletariat, all the while capable of linking back up with Marx to depict technology as a source of bourgeois control. Those ideas would come in the form of the German sociologist, Max Weber.

While expressly contrary to the Marxist economic goals,[724] Weber supplied for the critical theorists the necessary ground for their assault on the technological society with his concept of *Rationalisation*. While more will be discussed on this particular use of Weber in the following chapter on Marcuse, it is important nevertheless to briefly detail the central components of his concept of Rationalisation independently.

For Weber, Rationalisation is a tacitly agreed upon standard of reason within capitalist societies that effectively dehumanizes workers in order to fit them more efficiently within a broader social mechanism. This form of reason is integrated into the fabric of the social contract, wielded for the management of workers and the production of goods and services. It is a logic that is totalizing, all-permeating, and psychologically penetrating—reaching the depths of human consciousness—and is intrinsic to both the process and ultimate outcome of every human endeavor in society. Andrew Arato defines Rationalisation as:

> …the principle of orientation of human action to abstract, quantifiable and calculable, and instrumentally utilizable formal rules and norms. The key to formal rationality is the phrase 'without regard for persons' which was first expressed in its purity in the battle of early modern science against anthropomorphic nature philosophy.[725]

In short, Weber's Rationalisation is the willful repression of one's liberation by the tacit agreement of, and conformity to, a uniformed logic that abstracts, quantifies, and calculates

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[724] Arato expounds upon Weber's disagreement with Marx: "Once bureaucratized, the system of modern production could be democratized only at the cost of industrial efficiency. Once bureaucratized, the modern state and its military arm can be destroyed and replaced only by enemies equally well organized. The Marxist goals of freedom and material wealth are therefore incompatible with one another and with the proposed *means* of the political conquest of power." (*The Essential Frankfurt School*, P. 193)
[725] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 191.

human behavior and culture. For the Marxist, it is the alienation of workers by the strictures of their own rational faculties. Weber sees that what once was a force of liberation, rationality has now become the ultimate source of enslavement, which all works to the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

As he further describes the capitalist Rationalisation, Weber shows why this tacit agreement to dehumanizing reason is now necessary for survival in capitalistic economies: "There was repeated what everywhere and always is the result of such a process of rationalization: those who would not follow suit had to go out of business."[726] And in perhaps his most haunting description of the matter, Weber states:

> This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism…with irresistible force…. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' *But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.*[727]

The mere goal of self-preservation must be accompanied by a Rationalisation that enslaves the proletariat; to live one must trap him or herself within an "iron cage" of rationality bent on technological and economic expansion. Unlike Mumford's Megatechnic Bribe as a catalyst which begins the process of "mechanistic thinking," Weber's worker is bound by the survival impulse to this new dehumanizing form of reason.

Perhaps the most brutal example of this Rationalisation was witnessed in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, noted Weberian scholar, Zygmunt Bauman,[728] explains the level of rationality the entire process of

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[726] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Walcott Parsons, London, UK: Harper Collins, 1930/1991), P. 68.
[727] Weber, P. 181. Emphasis added.
[728] For a helpful essay which demonstrates Weber's clear influence in Bauman, see: Paul du Gay, "Is Bauman's bureau Weber's bureau?: a comment," in *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 50 Is. 4 (15 December 2003).

Jewish extermination exhibited. He states, "All single acts…were rational from the point of view of the administrators of the Holocaust; most of them were *also rational from the point of view of the victims."*[729] Even the victims had a shared Rationalisation that excused many of the atrocities. Commenting on the new Rationalisation that was exposed in the Holocaust, Horkheimer describes it as "reason revealing itself as unreason."[730] The Holocaust seemed fully rational, yet disturbingly irrational.

C. Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School

The third and final significant influence upon critical theory and the Frankfurt School was the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, Georg Lukács. Of the three thinkers described in this section, Lukács was most directly linked with the Frankfurt School, and is owed the most credit for the school's unique development and identity. Lukács laid the methodological groundwork for the Frankfurt School in two unique ways: (1) his integration of Weber into Marxist language and categories, and (2) his re-establishment of the Marxist dialectic through a renewed understanding of Hegel.

1. Integration of Weber and Marx

Despite Marx's incoherence on the nature of technology, Lukács will effectively read Weber's thoughts on Rationalisation *into* Marx, thus subjecting Marx to a type of revision that accentuates his more pessimistic views on technology and draws his economic language of commodification closer together with Weber's understanding of Rationalisation.[731] The synthesis of Marx's commodification with Weber's Rationalisation is what Lukács calls,

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[729] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), P. 143. Emphasis added.
[730] Horkheimer, *The Essential Frankfurt School*, P.46.
[731] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 192.

"reification" or "thingification."[732] The reified person is one who Rationalizes others and even him or herself to be a commodified product within the capitalist market, doing so subconsciously, without objection or resistance. The workers see one another and themselves as a "thing," devoid of their more organic and human qualities. Furthermore, the reification becomes increasingly entrenched within the proletariat conscience. Lukács states: "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man."[733] The more capitalism succeeds, the more deeply entrenched Reification becomes in human consciousness.

2. The Return of the Dialectic

Perhaps the most challenging Marxist 'failure' outlined previously is the apparent failure of the Marxist dialectic. The revolution failed and the workers no longer seem interested in liberation. This failure seems difficult to reconcile with the Hegelian-influenced historical dialectic, as, allegedly, *"No power whatsoever could, in the long run, stop the march of thought."*[734] However, Lukács will return to Hegel to discover a hidden explanation for this failure and impose this discovery upon his reading of Marx. This new use of Hegel will reinstate the Marxist dialectic and subsequently cause Horkheimer to focus the Frankfurt School's mission upon cultural critique rather than simply observation and description.

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[732] Karl Marx first analyzes reification in *Capital Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy* (translated by Ben Fowkes, New York, NY, Penguin Classics, 1992, Chapter 1, Section 4: The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret), but it is in the context strictly of fetishization and commodification, and prior to any incorporation with Weber's 'rationalisation.'

[733] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968.), P. 93.

[734] RAR, P. 239.

In Hegelian thought, and by extension Marxist thought, there must exist a "negative" or antithesis within reason, a cognitive rejection of the status quo, for the historical process to move forward; "The negative is a means for the self-revelation of the Absolute."[735] However, given the complacency of the proletariat, and indeed the now coercive properties of reason itself (Rationalisation/Reification), there is no negative reasoning to press the process forward. In his essay, "A Note on Dialectic," Marcuse states, "Today this dialectical mode of thought is alien to the whole established universe of discourse and action. It seems to belong to the past and to be rebutted by the achievements of technological civilization. The established reality seems promising and productive enough to repel or absorb all alternatives."[736] However, a central conception Lukács refashions for the critical theorist's Marxist project is the idea of a "dead period" of history, that is a period "…of non-conflict, of happiness…"[737] In other words, the dialectic has stalled, but, as Lukács hopes to demonstrate, the historical process can resume if the masses are able to realize a new class consciousness as it exists within the technological society through the realization of their true alienation.

It is here that Lukács—and later Adorno—fashions the Hegelian concept of "mediation." Mediation is an isolated break from Marxist materialism—the materialism which seeks rational fidelity to the material world—and instead allows for abstract theory to positively impact it. Hegel states, "…thinking [of] the empirical world essentially means altering its empirical form, and transforming it into something-universal; so thinking exercises a negative activity with regard to that foundation as well."[738] Because reason itself is compromised through the

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[735] Ivan A. Boldyrev, "Faust and the Phenomenology of Spirit," *Russian Studies in Philosophy,* trans. M.E. Sharpe, vol. 49, no. 4 (Spring, 2011), P. 81.
[736] Herbert Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," in *The Essential Frankfurt School*, P. 445.
[737] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 401.
[738] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1991), P. 96.

processes of Rationalisation or Reification, the Marxist must at this singular point break with its fidelity with materialism to rescue the entire Marxist project by way of abstract negative thinking. In a sense, Lukács has no choice but to endorse a kind of negative thinking that is drawn from abstraction to impose on the world so that class consciousness may awaken from its technological trance. Lukács, despite this relatively obscure concept of Hegel,[739] believes that "…a theory mediates the frozen, immediately given, 'reified' surface of reality…to the extent that it first recognizes…and reduplicates, and second raises to self-consciousness…the immanent tendencies of its object moving toward self-realization."[740] Essentially, abstract theory can provide a "jolt" to the seemingly content working class that lays a new ground work for negativity to reemerge.

From his use of mediation, Lukács lays out the new Marxist method in two parts. First, the Marxist must work from a theoretical basis, framing an abstract dialectic that negates the present reality. Second, the Marxist must *critique* society from the basis of that theory. It is from this reasoning that Horkheimer established the new goals of the Frankfurt School in his paper, "Traditional and Critical Theory;" the new Marxist shall not simply describe or understand society, but must now be moved to critique it. Without mediated theory and the proactive attempt to critique society, the proletariat shall remain content in their alienation, and the Marxist dialectic shall remain dead.

In conclusion, Lukács effectively provided for the Frankfurt School and critical theory a new foundation from which to work. His synthesis of Weber and Marx granted the Frankfurt

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[739] In his essay, "Hegel's Conception of Mediation" (*Hegel Bulletin*, vol. 20, Is.1-2, January 1999, P. 84) Brian O'Connor states, "Hegel gives little specific explanation of the concept of mediation. Surprisingly, it has been the subject of even less attention by scholars of Hegel. Nevertheless, it is casually used in discussion of Hegel and post-Hegelian philosophy as though its meaning were simple and straightforward."
[740] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 198.

School a way of articulating the technological society in critical fashion, and his new use of Hegel provided hope for the Marxist dialectic to reemerge. What is left now for the Frankfurt School is to mount a forceful critique against the technological society in a way that awakens the proletariat to the old forms of alienation expressing themselves in new ways.

D. Herbert Marcuse's Continuity with Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

This section will briefly describe how Marcuse is a continuation of the Frankfurt School, and by extension, Critical Theory. In general, there are three ways Marcuse is a continuation of the Frankfurt School's project: first, his admitted continuation of the Marxist dialectic; second, his use of Weber and Lukacs' understanding of Rationalisation and Reification as a critical lens into the technological society; and third, his reinterpretation of Hegel to provide a way forward through Critical Theory.

Both the Frankfurt School and Marcuse are still unequivocally Marxist in their conceptions of the self, history, and their central goals.[741] Asked during a BBC interview in 1978 why indeed Marcuse and the Frankfurt School remained loyal to the Marxist project, Marcuse responded:

> Easy answer: because I do not believe that the theory…has been falsified. What has happened is that some of the concepts of Marxian theory…have had to be re-examined; but this is not something from the outside brought into Marxist theory, it is something which Marxist theory itself, as an historical and dialectical theory, demands.[742]

It is interesting to note that Marcuse would appear to even see Weber and Lukács' additions as part and parcel to the Marxist project. In his mind, there is no break from Marx, but rather the

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[741] In his book, *Herbert Marcuse: From Marx to Freud and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1974. P. 13), Sidney Lipshires states, "This theory, called 'critical theory' by members of the Frankfurt school, was in fact, an idiosyncratic euphemism for their own brand of Marxism, a Marxism of more or less the Hegelian type already described as part of the intellectual armament of Herbert Marcuse."

[742] Herbert Marcuse, in *Men of Ideas*, ed. Bryan Magee (London: BBC Publications, 1978).

re-examination of Marx in light of new perspectives, is perhaps even a continuation of the dialectic.

Second, Marcuse will incorporate Weber and Lukács' understanding of Rationalisation/Reification to contextualize the new expressions of class struggle, or lack thereof, as they exist within the technological society. There is no break from the Marxist conceptual basis in these particular additions, though it should be noted that Marcuse will aggravate his ability to find liberation within the technological society in part because of it.

Third, Marcuse will attempt a way forward by reinterpreting Hegel and constructing a salvation plan for the proletariat in the form of various, partially integrated philosophies and expressions. This is by design Marcuse's most firmly counter-Marxist exercise.[743] He will attempt a Hegelian mediation of critique that is directed towards the worker, believing that theory, mediated through various avenues, will ultimately galvanize and revolutionize the proletariat's understanding of history and the world. Marcuse states, "The common element is the search for an 'authentic language'—the language of negation as the Great Refusal to accept the rules of the game in which the dice are loaded. The absent must be made present because the greater part of the truth is in that which is absent."[744] His new expression of Hegelian mediation is the attempt to create "self-conscious efforts to make the existing antagonisms work in the interest of the whole."[745]

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[743] Lipshires draws attention to Marcuse's break from the standard Marxist theory—as derived from Engels and Soviet Marxism—stating, "Their Marxism, based upon a mechanical view of man's reason as a passive reflection of the material world, failed to explain how human consciousness could rise above the world as given and thus effectively bring about change." (P. 3)
[744] Marcuse, *The Essential Frankfurt School,* P. 448.
[745] RAR, P. 77.

II: Marcuse's Anthropology

As structured in the third chapter, this thesis is working from the understanding that self is one's perception of one's own stature within the cosmos, and is expressed by way of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: (A) the human's relationship to nature and/or history, (B) how one relates to and understands the external world, and (C) how these assessments manifest within the aggregate state of the human's consciousness. Respective to each section, this section will (1) trace Marcuse's philosophical definition of self through these categories and (2) highlight his more fundamental differences with Niebuhr.

A. Humans in Conflict with Nature and History

1. Marcuse: The Self as Negation and Historical Unification

Marcuse's view of the self as it relates to nature and history comes in three distinct, yet mutually reinforcing, parts: (a) the self's historical alienation and self-negation, and (b) the self's negation as a resource for its reunification. This section will describe each part in detail, and how all come together to create his most central goal: liberation.

a. History and Negation

Both the Frankfurt School and Marcuse begin assessing human nature primarily through Marx's Hegelian historical structure. Essentially, the fullness of human nature is only found completed within the historical process as an abstract universal,[746] though exists presently in alienation, as the human currently "contradicts his essence."[747] Similar to Niebuhr, Marcuse's understanding of human nature is one which exists in a state of contradiction, though for

[746] Ibid., P. 227.
[747] Ibid., P. 277.

Marcuse, that contradiction is gradually becoming more assuaged through the historical process with each new step towards the realization of liberation.[748]

Ultimately, drawing heavily from Hegel, the goal of history for Marcuse is to bring the subject (conscience) into unity with the object (externally experienced world, property, labor, physical self).[749] The human is to become fully unified with one's universal identity, though at this present moment of history, the proletariat represents a profound negation of that universal. Marcuse states, "The existence of the proletariat contradicts the alleged reality of reason, for it sets before us an entire class that gives proof of the very negation of reason. The lot of the proletariat is no fulfillment of human potentialities, but the reverse."[750] Essentially, the human-as-laborer is living in stark contradiction with one's universal self because the human has been stripped of the potential to reach that which "constitute[s] man's essence."[751] The alienation of one's labor is the alienation of one's property: "…the first endowment of a free person…"[752] The subject is not in unity with that which it possesses. Property and labor (object) is "severed" from the subject through economic forces governed by the bourgeoisie.[753]

b. Negation and Unification

Marcuse's entire goal is to create new conditions that allow for the severance of subject and object to once more set itself on a trajectory towards unification. The self is to be unified by fully beholding that which he or she possesses within a seamless integration. As for now,

[748] Ibid., P. 227.
[749] Ibid., P. 260
[750] Ibid., P. 261.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Ibid.
[753] Ibid.

however, the human is "a definite historical antagonism,"[754] existing as a divided entity, severed from its unified essence, and living in contradiction with its true self. However, Marcuse sees that simultaneously the proletariat is both evidence of the negation, and the source of its own solution: "The truth of the materialist thesis is thus to be fulfilled in its negation."[755] In opposition to the human's disunity and division, Marcuse proclaims, "The *individual* is the goal."[756] In other words, the undivided self (*individual = not devisable*) is that for which Marcuse is reaching.

2. Marcuse and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding Humans, Nature, and History

a. Historical Conflict or Existential Conflict

Niebuhr's starting point for understanding the subject/object in many ways precedes Marcuse. While Marcuse's assessment of human nature begins with the Hegelian assumption that history is the universalizing, transcendent force of nature, Niebuhr begins simply from the position of self-awareness—the subject considering itself as both subject and object. It is not until Niebuhr finds himself to be a very conflicted creature that he later turns to consider his place within history. But for Marcuse, the Hegelian dialectic is the resource from which he interprets the human condition as one that is in contradiction with itself.

Regardless of where history comes into each thinkers account, both very quickly realize that the human's relationship to nature and history reveals a creature who is in utter conflict with itself. Both understand there to be very concrete limitations which obscure the human's capacity to fully realize its true essence, and both are apparently severed in their desired link between the

[754] Ibid.
[755] Ibid., 273.
[756] Ibid., 283. Emphasis added.

subject (conscience) and object (that which is observed/experienced). For Marcuse, this comes from the Hegelian philosophical system of history; for Niebuhr, it is observed existentially through the very process of self-awareness.

b. Resolvable Human or Irresolvable Human

Furthermore, for both Niebuhr and Marcuse, the goal for the human is composed within the very way they perceive the internal contradiction of humans operating within nature. Because the historical dialectic reveals the human's nature progressively, the goal for Marcuse is ultimately unification, assuaging the severance of the divided self in hopes of becoming complete. He then must proceed with Critical Theory in hopes of jolting the proletariat free from the technological snag in the dialectic so that history may proceed to reveal the full self.

However, for Niebuhr, because the contradiction is perceived existentially, before any application of Hegel and before even considering the human-as-laborer, the problem of contradiction appears *inherent* to the human condition, and therefore impossible to assuage through reason or historical process. Niebuhr reasons that the human must accept the contradiction; the subject will never be fully integrated into the external world and will, indeed, forever remain to some degree in tension with it.[757] To use Hegelian terms, Niebuhr proposes an inherent, non-progressive internal dialectic.[758] The negative is a permanent characteristic of human nature.[759] Though, to translate into Niebuhr's more Christian terms, the permanent

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[757] IOAH, P. 62-63: "The final wisdom of life requires, not the annulment of incongruity but the achievement of serenity within and above it."

[758] In his essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History" (in *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr,* ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press, 1975. P. 40), Gilkey posits Niebuhr's dialectic not in terms of a temporal Hegelian dialectic, but rather a *vertical* dialectic, "between transcendence and creatureliness, between eternity and time…between God and world…vertically related to past, present, *and* future."

[759] Gilkey: "As for Niebuhr, the ontological structure of man remains constant throughout history, characterizing the future as it has the past and the present, so the ambiguous, 'sinful' character of man's actualization of that structure is a permanent characteristic of history." (Ibid.)

negative found within the subject/object relationship is manifest as anxiety: the conditions necessary for sin.[760]

B. The Subject Relating to and Understanding the Objective World

1. Marcuse: Revising Marxist Thought

In true Marxist form, Marcuse argues that true understanding comes from a perspective and language that is grounded in nature and history. However, Marcuse argues that the traditional Marxist view of knowledge and understanding is severely lacking in its deemphasis on what Marcuse would consider the most basic realities of nature. This section will explore the following foundations regarding Marcuse's epistemology: (a) that which is most akin to traditional Marxism, the primacy of dialectical materialism, and (b) the unique guiding principles in Marx's earlier writings—which Marcuse will reintegrate into dialectical materialism—namely, "Sensuousness and Needs."

a. Primacy of Dialectical Materialism

For Marcuse, the self-as-subject is disjointed and in conflict with the self-as-object, and fully relies upon the governance of history to propel both aspects towards unity. However, working alongside history, and in accordance with Marx, Marcuse maintains that a certain perspective occurs "…when we conceive things as they really are and happened,"[761] where "…speculation ends, namely in actual life, [that] real, positive science begins as the

[760] Niebuhr: "In short, man, being both free and bound, both limited and limitless, is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved. Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin (NDHN, P. 182)." Essentially, the subject/object distinction, the alienation and contradictions inherent in human nature display themselves within an anxious position. It is this anxiety, as opposed to serenity, that harbors the capacity for sin. This "negation" is for Niebuhr, the conditions for sin: the sinful nature.
[761] Karl Marx, "The German Ideology, Pt. 1" in *Selected Writings*, P. 113.

representation of the practical activity and practical process of the development of men."[762] As stated in the previous section (I), the Frankfurt School maintains that reason or logic, so long as it maintains fidelity with the material world, is a necessary tool for progressing the Marxist dialectic. Marcuse affirms his continuity of this fidelity:

> Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation…. Any mode of thought which excludes this contradiction from its logic is a faulty logic. Thought 'corresponds' to reality only as it transforms reality by comprehending its contradictory structure…. For to comprehend reality means to comprehend what things really are…[763]

The most important aspect of Marcuse's epistemology—or his subject relating to and understanding the objective world—is that it maintains a dual foundation of history and nature that is unified in the universal structure of truth. History unfolds the Absolute, and understanding is housed within a kind of thinking which directly corresponds with a historically-guided nature.

In terms of the negative, or alienation, expressed in the current nature of the proletariat, Marcuse proclaims, "The realization of reason therefore implies the overcoming of this estrangement, the establishment of a condition in which the subject knows and possesses itself in all its objects."[764] Firmly within the Hegelian structure of historical epistemology, it is reason which works alongside history to create the conditions for the proletariat's unification.

b. Expanding Materialism: Sensuousness and Needs

While reason provides for Marcuse the ability of the proletariat to overcome estrangement, he sees that the current *kind* of reason utilized by contemporaneous Marxists was

[762] Ibid., P. 112.
[763] Marcuse, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* P. 446.
[764] RAR, P. 260.

"…ossifying into a rigid orthodoxy which was serving as a legitimating ideology for the political practice of Marxian parties or governments."[765] It is in this way that Marcuse's understanding of epistemology must be contrasted with the more "mechanical" view of human nature posed by those Marxists who would represent the key interpreters of Marx during Marcuse's time.

The predominant view of Marx at the time, represented in the work of Engels and the Soviets, stated that the nature of humans was that of an "ontological materialism," where "matter is the essence of Being."[766] Essentially, human beings are directly integrated with nature and are unwittingly determined by the historical process which ultimately progresses towards the liberation of the proletariat; the human being's reason is a part of the historical process, and therefore, exists within a determined state. However, the central distinguishing element of the Frankfurt School as previously described was its insistence that the current formulation of both society *and* reason must be *critiqued,* changed, theoretically mediated to awaken the proletariat from the bonds of alienation which are now present *even within reason itself*. The mission is no longer to rationally *describe* the human as he or she exists within history, but rather to *change* the human's reason to overcome its bondage to another form of reason (Rationalisation/Reification) which has set humanity on a dark and destructive trajectory. Essentially, the nature of humans must be transformed by changing how the proletariat reasons.[767] Human nature as it currently exists—the way the subject currently understands and relates to the object—*is* the problem. A fundamental change in the way the human sees the self is necessary for revolution and unification.

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[765] Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism,* P. 58.
[766] Lipshires, P. 3.
[767] In *Counter Revolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), Marcuse proclaims that there can be "no radical social change without a radical change of the individual agents of change (P. 48)."

Thus, Marcuse's view on epistemology springs primarily from his revision of Marx's early writings—particularly Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts.*[768] In his interpretive article on the work, Marcuse argues that these early writings are the key to understanding Marx's view of human nature. He states, "These *Manuscripts* put the discussion of the origins and original meaning of historical materialism…on a new basis."[769] First and foremost, Marcuse affirms the Marxist basis that humans are by nature laborers, and that the alienation of one's labor "…is not only the cornerstone of political economy, but contains a fundamental anthropological dimension."[770] Human-as-laborer is the starting point for both Marx and Marcuse, and the negative within the dialectic is that which is currently present: alienation of labor.

However, the "new basis" that Marcuse would discover within Marx is highlighted in the *sensuousness* and *needs* of the human-as-laborer, as opposed to its more traditional "rational" faculties. This is to say that humans are not merely passive material objects carried forth determinately, mechanically, and rationally, but rather harbor within them "potentialities" grounded in their *sensuousness* (over and against mechanical) aims to "fulfill basic needs."[771] Marcuse shows that "[early] Marx stresses the primacy of human agency, the **creative ability** to produce objects and to recognize one's self and one's humanity objectified in the human-social world."[772] Concerning Marcuse's findings, Douglas Kellner states: "Labour is thus an activity in which basic human powers are manifest: it develops one's faculties of reason and intelligence, it

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[768] Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism,* P. 77.
[769] Marcuse, Herbert, "New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (trans. Boris de Bres, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972. P. 136-174), P. 138.
[770] Kellner, P. 80.
[771] Bertell Ollman and Agnes Heller both argue Marcuse was the first with this translation of Marx. See: *Alienation* (New York, NY: Cambridge Press, 1971); *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London, UK: Allison & Busby Press, 1976).
[772] Kellner, P. 82. Emphasis added.

exercises bodily capabilities, it is social and communal activity, and it exemplifies human **creativity** and **freedom**."[773] Marcuse's reinterpretation of Marx, therefore, injects a certain power of creativity over the historical process, grounded within a certain *sensuousness* that appears more primal than reason. "Labor," Marcuse declares, "…is the existential activity of man, his free, conscious activity…"[774] Humans are historical and material in nature, but are not subject to the descriptive **rationality** that seems to accompany history in correlative unity. There is a creative element that engages with the world through labor, and the human embodies therefore a more potent, less predictable, less rational self than that which the more mechanical Marxists perceived.

The concepts of *sensuousness* and *need* provide for Marcuse a window into Marx—a window many of his contemporaries neglected or refused[775]—that would open a door for the previously described "mediation" that Hegel described: the proactive application of theory upon history as a *creative* tool that fulfilled a particular *need* that is not subject to the prevailing forms of Rationalisation.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, Marcuse would explore many resources for the framework of this creativity, but is particularly indebted to Heidegger's phenomenology, Feuerbach's naturalism, and Freud's psychoanalysis. With each school, Marcuse attempts to create a dimension of the self that is creative and capable of expressing the dialectic in a world where reason has been co-opted by the current reigning techno-bourgeois program of thought.

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[773] Ibid., P. 82. Emphasis added.
[774] RAR, P. 275.
[775] According to Kellner (P. 78), Marcuse's contemporaries largely neglected the early writings of Karl Marx, claiming it was "an opening stage which Marx completely abandoned in his later critique of political economy," though would later engage themselves in "heated polemics against those who would found their Marxism on the early Marx."

It is important to note, however, that Marcuse never abandons the materialist dialectic of history.[776] No matter the goals of the various philosophers he will use, no matter the anthropological foundations from which these thinkers begin, Marcuse's goal is to create an epistemic dimension outside of modern reason, yet still firmly grounded within the material world, that can mediate the theory of history to the proletariat. Marcuse will eventually utilize the ideas of Heidegger, Feuerbach, and Freud to add dimension to the Marxian self, but it should be noted that despite whatever Marcuse wishes to call it (Heidegger's *authentic existence*, Feuerbach's *sensuousness*, Freud's *instinctual liberation*), he is still attempting to close the gap between subject and object through an appeal to a higher reason and consciousness, a subject that understands the truth of the self through its materially-based, implied negation.

2. Marcuse and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding the Human's Relationship to and Understanding of Nature and History

a. Co-opted Reason or Ambiguous Reason

Similar to Marcuse, Niebuhr distrusts pure reason as the basis of epistemology, though his suspicion comes from a very different place. While Marcuse is suspicious of reason because it is currently coopted by technological Rationalisation/Reification, Niebuhr is *fundamentally* suspicious of reason, because "…the self is always the master, and not the servant, of its reason."[777] The full complexity of human impulse—one's animalistic desires, needs, drives, and illusions—is at work in the construction of reason. In Niebuhr's words, "The will to power uses reason as kings use courtiers and chaplains, to add grace to their enterprise. Even the most

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[776] Despite his various uses of existential, natural, and psychoanalytical expressions of human beings, Marcuse still views human nature as materialistic. Kellner states, "…for both Marx and Marcuse, although the activity of objectification is a ground for the possibility of alienation, 'alienation' itself is historically constituted by the capitalist mode of production and can only be overcome when capitalism is abolished (*Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism,* P. 80-81)."

[777] SDH, P. 17.

rational men are never quite rational when their own interests are at stake."[778] While Marcuse trusts "right" reason—that which rightfully reflects the dialectic, one's needs and sensuousness—and distrusts Rationalisation, Niebuhr seems to echo Hume: "Reason is…the slave to the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."[779]

However, it is important to note that while Niebuhr is suspicious of reason, he does not view reason as inherently evil. For Niebuhr, reason is an ambiguous tool which accentuates *all* human drives—those which are both destructive *and* harmonizing. Niebuhr states, "Reason enables [the human], within limits, to direct his energy so that it will flow in harmony, and not in conflict, with other life…His social impulses are more deeply rooted than his rational life…[but] Reason may extend and stabilise [sic]…the capacity to affirm other life than his own."[780] While reason is often a primary tool of evil, reason also appears to be a tool for good.

It is in this way that Niebuhr's view on reason can be described as "ambiguous." Gilkey describes Niebuhr's view on the ambiguity of reason in the following manner:

> On the one hand, reason is for Niebuhr the principle by which men and women transcend their own partial interests to achieve a more universal viewpoint; thus it is the principle of creativity in human life… At the same time, however, reason is the principle by which those partial and selfish interests are defended, justified, and expanded. [781]

Reason is the instrument used to establish, and "more universalize," the human's *perception* of the highest good from a more transcendent perspective, though it is ultimately motivated by highly irrational goals—be they malevolent or benevolent. Reason is ambiguous in that it is

[778] MMIS, P. 44.
[779] Hume, P. 127.
[780] MMIS, P. 26.
[781] Gilkey, *On Niebuhr*, P. 35.

relative, that it can be used for both harm or good, and that it is more finite and non-universal than the self may otherwise deceptively imagine.[782]

b. Reason Concealing Truth or Reason Concealing Human Irrationality

The key difference between Marcuse and Niebuhr is that Marcuse distrusts reason because it (Rationalisation/Reification) conceals the *truth* within human nature, whereas Niebuhr distrusts reason because it conceals the *irrationality* within human nature. This difference is what essentially sets the two thinkers into opposing methodological directions. For Marcuse, the project is at first *critical* in that he attempts to counteract the prevailing forms of reason so as to expose the true self. However, for Niebuhr, the project is to *clarify* human nature so that reason may instruct the agent more realistically; or as Lovin states when describing Niebuhr's method, "…to have an imaginative grasp of possibilities for one's life as well as an accurate picture of its realities."[783]

C. Consciousness

1. Marcuse: True and False Consciousness

By his own admission, Marcuse's definition of human consciousness is highly sociological, and it is vital to note from the outset that he views society as the primary foundation upon which the individual achieves transcendence over the historical process.[784] For Marcuse consciousness is "…a disposition, propensity, or faculty. It is not one individual disposition or faculty among others, however, but in a strict sense a general disposition which is common, in various degrees, to the individual members of one group, class, society."[785] Effectively, the

[782] Ibid., P. 12.
[783] Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, P. 17.
[784] Ibid.
[785] ODM, P. 208.

individual maintains a collective consciousness that emerges within and over the individual's group that comes to inform the human of all natural, historical, political, and economic realities.

It is from this sociologically-bound definition that Marcuse proceeds by differentiating two opposing views of consciousness: (a) "true consciousness," a collective consciousness that is aware of the dialectic, and (b) "false consciousness," a collective consciousness that is unaware of the dialectic. Additionally, (c) Marcuse speaks of the ability to transfer a "false" collective consciousness to a "true" collective consciousness. This section will further explain each in more detail.

a. True Consciousness

"True consciousness" is the collective synthesis of "the data of experience in concepts which reflect, as fully and adequately as possible, the given society in the given facts."[786] Essentially, true consciousness is society understanding itself truly. Integrated into this true understanding, is the truth that is "negatively present," as well; in other words, that which is known dialectically—that which is absent, yet true.[787] Although humans are alienated from their labor at present—although the subject is currently perceived as separate from object—the group consciousness sees the truth that this is not reality as a historical necessity; their consciousness is both the true declaration of their current condition, *and* the true negation of that current reality.[788]

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[786] Ibid.
[787] Ibid., P. 209.
[788] In his article, "Herbert Marcuse: freedom and dialectic" (*Politikon* Vol. 14 Iss. 2, 1987: P. 39) Eric Wainwright is quick to highlight the Platonic influence in Marcuse's construction of conscience. Wainwright states: "The concept is metaphysically derived and is set up as an ethical and moral norm against which existence itself may be measured (the Platonic form). The concrete substance of all freedom, that is, the basis for the realm of freedom, is found in freedom from want. Marcuse considers that this substance can be achieved through direct action (Marx's praxis) and, in this case, revolutionary action is meant."

b. False Consciousness

"False consciousness," on the other hand, is simply the repression of truth and the social acceptance of the perceived reality as necessity without negation. Marcuse states, "[False] Consciousness is absolved…by the general necessity of things…One man can give the signal that liquidates hundreds and thousands of people, then declare himself free from all the pangs of conscience, and live happily ever after."[789] For Marcuse, accepting what is perceived as what is true is the origin of false consciousness, because it negates the potentialities Universal to humans and becomes "overpowered by the things he has himself made," be it economic, religious, or any *object* perceived as "other."[790]

c. False Consciousness to True Consciousness

For Marcuse, the change from false consciousness to true consciousness is dependent upon the acceptance of theory. He claims that true consciousness is "represented by correct theory, which transcends the form of the production process in the direction of its content,"[791] while false consciousness is that which "remains on this side of such transcendence and considers the historical form of the production process to be eternally valid."[792] Theory is presented by Marcuse to be the great savior of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. "Theory," Marcuse proclaims, "…has the task of moving beyond appearance to essence and explicating its content as it appears to true consciousness." For Marcuse, true consciousness is a class of people

[789] ODM, P. 79.
[790] RAR, P. 260.
[791] NEG, P. 84.
[792] Ibid.

who embody the "essence" of truth which emerges from the negative in the material realm, not unlike a Platonic form experienced beyond the shadowy receptacles of common perception.[793]

2. Marcuse and Niebuhr: Differences Regarding Consciousness

a. Resolvable Consciousness or Irresolvable Consciousness

Superficially, Niebuhr at first appears similar to Marcuse. For Niebuhr, there does appear to be a *kind* of "good" and "bad" consciousness, though to label them as such is quite misleading. There is never a truly "good" consciousness in that it is "true" or purely moral for Niebuhr. However, for Niebuhr, there is a preferable *perception* of self that is more *realistic* about human limitations and power than other perceptions; one that is understood through the Christian myth and is true to both human capacity and limitation.

Like Marcuse, Niebuhr's consciousness is one that can be deceived; however, while Marcuse views "false consciousness" as that which can be remedied through correct theory, Niebuhr argues that the chief deception is that one could ever fully resolve oneself at all. What is more, Niebuhr argues that the self is plagued with an anxiety as it seeks to overcome the seemingly irresolvable disunity within—precisely the goal Marcuse seeks to accomplish.[794] The self as subject is in a sense free and limitless, it transcends nature in its perspective and imagination; yet as object it is bound and limited, incapable of completely overcoming death, need, and its animalistic drives. Human consciousness is seemingly limited and limitless, simultaneously. These internal contradictions of consciousness never go away, yet Marcuse

[793] For a more in-depth analysis on the Platonism within Marcuse, see Eric Wainwright's essay, "Herbert Marcuse: freedom and dialectic," P. 36-56.
[794] SDH, P. 22.

insists that a special kind of "theory" or critical reason can eventually liberate one's alienation through the affirmation of a "true consciousness."

In what appears to be a direct counter to Marcuse, Niebuhr argues that the condition in which the human finds him or herself is a bitter state where one desires to reconcile what it lacks in the objective realm (for Marcuse, alienation) with those resources it can imagine in the subjective realm (for Marcuse, negative thinking), but the human ultimately fails to ever do so completely within every context of history. "In short," Niebuhr states, "man, being both free and bound, both limited and limitless, is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved."[795] While Marcuse affirms that a human can perceive the realities of self in order to overcome one's current contradictions, Niebuhr sees those contradictions as an existential reality that one simply cannot overcome, and, indeed, Marcuse compounds the problem of the human condition in every attempt to do so. Therefore, it is not surprising that Marcuse never addresses anxiety as an inevitable concomitant to all human action, as his goal is always to resolve the tensions of consciousness through a collective consciousness that "rightly" understands the self. However, Niebuhr argues that anxiety is an inevitable feature to the human condition that reveals the human's inability to completely resolve him or herself enough to fully align with one's highest values.

For Niebuhr, it is at the point of anxiety that the human being leaps into some form of understanding that harbors the potentiality to falsely assuage or prematurely unify the fissured presentation of self through one's adherence to some illusory universal form of meaning. Niebuhr states, "Man's freedom is unique because it enables him, though in the temporal

[795] NDHN, P. 182. Parenthetical terms added.

process, also to transcend it by conceptual knowledge, memory and a self-determining will. Thus he creates a new level of coherence and meaning…."[796] Essentially, while the anxious and homeless human, endowed by one's freedom, can leap beyond the fractured self to find meaning, too often one is tempted towards illusion through "too simple and premature solutions;"[797] an illusion which has the dual consequence of aggrandizing the self (pride) *and* obscuring the self's relationship with the natural world in a way that eliminates personal responsibility (sensuality).

b. Right Reason or Faithful Serenity & Clarity

While the desire for Marcuse is to overpower and resolve self-contradiction by way of affirming "true consciousness," this to Niebuhr is precisely the problem: it is a betrayal of natural limitations and drives, and a deception of the highest order. But the Christian view of the sinful condition, on the other hand, "requires, not the annulment of incongruity but the achievement of serenity within and above it."[798] While Marcuse chiefly desires the self to attain liberating truth and to effectively "annul" one's "incongruities," Niebuhr chiefly desires a clarity of self, which he argues is a byproduct of faith and acceptance. To put it another way, Marcuse desires to resolve an historical dialectic through reason, while Niebuhr's desire is to more clearly perceive and accept the existential dialectic.

Niebuhr argues that while anxiety is an inevitable byproduct of the human condition, faith in a God who provides the necessary ground of meaning is essential for finding serenity within and above it. Quoting Kierkegaard, Niebuhr states, "Anxiety…is the dizziness of freedom."[799] In other words, anxiety is caused by the presumption of unfettered power and

[796] FAH, P. 15.
[797] NDHN, P. 4.
[798] IOAH, P. 63.
[799] NDHN, P. 252.

freedom as it clashes with the reality of human limitations. Human consciousness allows for infinite imagination, unending theoretical speculation, and perfect ideology, yet only finite action, in a finite amount of time, with highly fallible agents of execution. The clash between the freedom of consciousness and the limited features of lived experience will inevitably lead to the "dizziness" of that freedom, or in Niebuhr's assessment, anxiety. The temptation of this anxiety is to leap into a faith of one's infinite consciousness or into one's completely bound state. However, Niebuhr continues: "…but it is significant that the same freedom which tempts to anxiety also contains the ideal possibility of knowing God."[800] In other words, discoverable in that clash between subject and object—between limitless consciousness and limited action—is a God who not only provides serenity in the given anxiety, but also houses the contradictions of the human condition without resolving them prematurely.

While "right thinking" is essential for Marcuse's "true consciousness," the presumption that such right thinking can ever occur is for Niebuhr what is most damning and destructive. Instead, what is needed is a clearer picture of self by way of a faith principle which is more revelatory of the human's homeless state. [801] To Niebuhr, the faith principle—particularly, on this occasion, faith in the Christian God—is the fullest deterrent against the human's capacity for evil and destruction within its imagined transcendent state of consciousness. Faith, as opposed to self-illusion masquerading as "right reason," is the *honest admission* of one's weakness in its pursuit to derive meaning from an attainable universal.

Ultimately, the primary difference between the two thinkers in how they perceive consciousness is that Marcuse sees a theory-based collective class-consciousness that is capable

[800] Ibid.
[801] Ibid., P. 158.

of overcoming its historical self-contradiction, while Niebuhr sees an anxious self-consciousness that is incapable of overcoming its self-contradiction, though has the ability to find serenity in its limitations through faith. Because of these differences, Marcuse seeks critique and unification, while Niebuhr seeks clarification and serenity.

III: Marcuse's Easy Conscience

Ultimately, the greatest distinction between Niebuhr and Marcuse's construction of anthropology is that Niebuhr's results in an uneasy conscience, while Marcuse's anthropology results in an easy conscience. To make this distinction is to say that Marcuse's anthropology analyzes evil and immorality as *necessary* defects to one's historical and rational position, while Niebuhr maintains the idea that the human is "…sinful at the very centre of his personality, that is in his will…" and in the realm of human freedom and choice.[802] It is in this way that Niebuhr's construction of anthropology allows for ethical responsibility—the freedom to act benevolently and malevolently; capable of conceiving of evil as derived from the self—while Marcuse's anthropology attributes evil to either historical or rational defect.

Similar to Mumford's easy conscience, one which articulated evil as originating from the realms of natural and rational defect as opposed to human freedom, Marcuse makes the same mistake in presenting an alternative hybrid of historical dialecticism and rationalism. Evil is traceable, not to the self, but to errors in reasoning (false consciousness) or the dialectical "glitch" he and other critical theorists perceive in the historical rise of technology, capital, and fascism.

[802] Ibid., P. 23.

It is in this way that one error effectively leads Marcuse to make a second. The "glitch" in the dialectic necessarily leads the Frankfurt School to articulate evil in a new sphere because their prior conception of dialectical materialism was simply irredeemable on its own. Thus, Marcuse and the critical theorists partially remove the evil from history to place it within the realm of rationality; a realm he sees as more capable of redemption through simply correcting one's thought.

However, while Marcuse seeks to establish a realm of freedom within the Marxist-Hegelian dialectic of history by rediscovering a seemingly more pliant form of reason—that in accordance with his conception of sensuousness and need—such freedom liberates the self enough to perhaps *think* more freely, but that freedom does not extend enough into the realm of history and action so as to attribute evil to the self. Evil is still an historical defect, but now it is additionally a rational defect, complicating the goal of liberation by making it a *rational* unification of a victim of *history*. Therefore, Marcuse's human is still essentially good, only in need of time and proper "negative thinking" for its salvation.

Furthermore, while Marx and Marcuse's conception of alienation exists *necessarily* as a part of the proletariat's historical existence and attributes wrong-doing and injustices to those forces outside of one's control, the Christian view of sin, Niebuhr argues, "can therefore not be attributed to a defect in his essence. It can only be understood as a self-contradiction, made possible by the fact of his freedom but not following necessarily from it."[803] The *potentiality* for sin resides in the state of the human's self-contradiction, or homelessness, but the *actuality* of sin emerges only from human freedom, rendering the individual responsible for one's actions and

[803] Ibid., P. 17.

not the result of historical or natural necessity. This construct provides the possibility for what Niebuhr calls, the *uneasy conscience*.

Chapter 7: Marcuse, Niebuhr, and the Self within the Technological Society

Introduction

The primary goal for this thesis is to construct a synthesis of the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Marcuse in order to create a new type of technological engagement from the basis of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. This chapter will continue with and complete the prophetic methodology of this thesis by critiquing the work of Herbert Marcuse from the position of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology. Specifically, this chapter will pull Marcuse out of the broader tradition of Critical Theory to introduce his specific critique of the technological society, and demonstrate how his anthropology obscures the ethical implications of that critique. Ultimately, this will lead to the following chapter, will put forth the ethical component of this thesis, which is to construct from a synthesis of Niebuhr, Mumford, and Marcuse a new type of understanding ethical engagement with technology that can maintain an uneasy conscience, namely, *technological ambiguity*.

In keeping with the goal of this chapter, this chapter will do two things. First, (I) this chapter will lay out Marcuse's critique of the technological society. Second, (II) this chapter will critique the ethical implications of Marcuse's easy conscience in the technological society. Essentially, while the first section of this chapter will provide helpful insights for the final synthesis of the three thinkers observed in this thesis, the second section of this chapter will continue the prophetic critique of the anthropology supporting Mumford's observations.

I: Marcuse's Self in the Technological Society

It should be noted that among the three major schools of technological philosophy (critical, substantive, and instrumental), Critical Theory describes perhaps the most formidable

and despairing picture of the technological society. Indeed, for the critical theorist, "a quieter, more insidious bondage of consciousness has taken the place of older, more 'immediate' forms of oppression (which had allowed at least for opposition in thought)."[804] Among those within the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, the entire ability to reason—an extremely important feature within the Marcuse's composition of self—is co-opted by the oppressive bourgeois system of labor. In his conclusive remarks on the topic, Marcuse declares that "technological progress leads to the rule of dead matter over the human world."[805]

However, unlike many of his contemporaries in the Frankfurt School, Marcuse has hope for a way forward, though at times he appears embroiled in a "frenzied search in the social periphery for potential revolutionary subjects…."[806] Though despite this characteristic hope in the impending utopia, this chapter must now turn to describe the obstacle in Marcuse's way—an obstacle which shall overwhelm his hope in a seemingly disproportionate fashion.

Within Marcuse's assessment, the most dominating feature of technological society is found in its ability to infiltrate human consciousness. While some technologists like Ellul[807] point to the media and propaganda as one of the chief epicenters for technological dominance over the individual and society, Critical Theory locates a precondition for the technological integration of the individual long before propaganda or instruments of social control arrive. Marcuse states, "The preconditioning does not start with the mass production of radio and television and with the centralization of their control. The people enter this stage as

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[804] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 220.
[805] RAR, P. 282.
[806] Arato & Gebhardt, P. xvi.
[807] Ellul states, "The natures of man and propaganda have become so inextricable mixed that everything depends on choice or on free will, but on reflex and myth. The prolonged and hypnotic repetition of the same complex of ideas, the same images, and the same rumors conditions man for the assimilation of his nature to propaganda." (*Technological Society*, P. 366)

preconditioned receptacles of long standing; the decisive difference is in the flattening out of the contrast (or conflict) between the given and the possible, between the satisfied and the unsatisfied needs."[808] Before media or propaganda arrives on the scene, society is already conditioned in a way to act mechanistically. For Marcuse, there are three facets to this precondition: (A) Reification or technological reasoning, (B) Repressive Desublimation, and, finally, (C) the flattening out of society, or what Marcuse calls, "One-Dimensionality."

A. Reification and Technological Rationality

As discussed previously in Chapter 6, reification is the process by which "man and nature become fungible objects of organization."[809] However, to understand Marcuse's particular brand of reification, it is perhaps best to understand it first in relation to who is presumed to be his greatest influence in the area, and his former professor, Martin Heidegger.[810] While it has been speculated that Marcuse owes much of his critique of the technological society to Martin Heidegger, and indeed the two appear similar in how they understand the rational components of "enframing" that were discussed in the prolegomena, the two differ in two significant ways. First, reification, as stated previously, is developed within the Marxist tradition and so carries with it certain economic and social implications, critiques, and conclusions. To use Marxist language, reification is a product of the human's alienation within the capitalist society. Essentially, it is the dehumanization of persons for the purposes of certain political or economic ends, especially those imposed upon the working class by bourgeois society. The human is a worker who is alienated by the dominance of capital, and so the actual dehumanization of the

[808] ODM, P. 8.
[809] ODM, P. 168.
[810] For excellent resources on the Heidegger/Marcuse relationship, see: Richard Wolin, "Introduction to Herbert Marcuse and Martin Heidegger: An Exchange of Letters," in *New German Critique* No. 53 (Spring – Summer, 1991); Andrew Feenberg, "Heidegger and Marcuse: On Reification and Concrete Philosophy," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, Francois Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (eds.), (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

person is less a passive byproduct of what Heidegger calls, "enframing"—a cyclical way of thought imposed on the self and nature by the direction of self—and more a product of the systemic economic oppression of laborers.

The second way reification differs from Heidegger is that reification begins with the transmutation of human reason into economically-directed objectives. For Heidegger, enframing begins in the will, positioned towards a desired end and a negation of the revealing properties of the technology being created. However, for Marcuse, there is something that occurs prior to this free consideration of the world: a pre-existing, end-oriented rationality, or a kind of economically-oriented inner-language that is an extension of one's economic and historically expressed alienation. Essentially, Marcuse's reification is an extension of one's alienated condition that is expressed in the process of considering "every form of being as a form of reason."[811]

While Marcuse holds reification squarely within the Marxist tradition of labor and proletarian struggle,[812] he extends the concept of reification to apply its meaning to the technological society. He states, "The universal effectiveness and productivity of the apparatus under which [the proletariats] are subsumed veil the particular interests that organize the apparatus. In other words, technology has become the great vehicle of *reification*…."[813] To Marcuse, reification reaches its most devastating and dehumanizing form through the efficiency and productivity of the capitalistic technological society. His merger of technology with reification—which formerly under Marx and Lukács only described a kind of "market

[811] RAR, P. 24.
[812] Marcuse: "Marx's early writings are the first explicit statement of the process of reification through which capitalist society makes all personal relations between men take the form of objective relations between things." (P. 279)
[813] ODM, P. 168-169.

rationality"[814]—manifests within Marcuse's concept of "technological rationality." Technological rationality is an epistemic infiltration of the technological process; all of reality is filtered through a mode of reason that commodifies and reifies all external realities into mechanistic, technological properties. The technological society is essentially a product of the bourgeois-controlled market, and technological rationality—reducing all of nature (humans included) down to functional elements within a machine—is a way of thinking that is adopted by the proletariat to ensure survival and market ends. This style of thinking becomes present within all aspects of the technological society—from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat—and the end result is the continual dehumanization and commodification of all objects in reality, including the self.

Acting as a new kind of reification, technological rationality is derived from the confluence of scientific and technical ideals of progress and efficiency, and is then transformed into a unifying social and economic code of operation. Marcuse states, "Theoretical and practical Reason, academic and social behaviorism meet on common ground: that of an advanced society which makes scientific and technical progress into an instrument of domination."[815] Essentially, technological rationality is an all-consuming instrument or way of thinking that transmutes all of nature into standing reserve to the benefit of those powerful few within society that lord over the workers. It is in this way that Marcuse's critique of technology is really an extension of the Marxist critique of capitalism.

Technological rationality is still the reified relationship of a kind of reason's domination over humans and nature, only now technology becomes the chief instrument of reification for

[814] Feenberg, P. 167.
[815] Ibid, P. 16.

those in power. To Marcuse, technological rationality then becomes the most monstrous form of "irrationality" because, while deceptively "rational," at least as it is internally consistent with its tasks and means, it is leveraged towards irrational ends at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Marcuse states, "The industrial society which makes technology and science its own is organized for the ever-more-effective domination of man and nature, for the ever-more-effective utilization of its resources. It becomes irrational…."[816]

The prospect of locating the self within this system becomes increasingly difficult the more Marcuse analyzes the depth of technological rationality. He states:

> The social position of the individual and his relation to others appear not only to be determined by objective qualities and laws, but these qualities and laws seem to lose their mysterious and uncontrollable character; they appear as calculable manifestations of (scientific) rationality. The world tends to become the stuff of total administration, which absorbs even the administrators. The web of domination has become the web of Reason itself, and this society is fatally entangled in it. And the transcending modes of thought seem to transcend Reason itself.[817]

For Marcuse, technological rationality intensifies reification to the point that the individual is completely consumed. *Even the way a human thinks is a part of the machine*. It is at this point that Marcuse appears almost indistinguishable from Ellul, save his use of soft qualifiers such as "appear," seem," and "tends." But these qualifiers disappear as Marcuse moves from reification to the next step in his critique of technological society: Repressive Desublimation.

B. Repressive Desublimation

An additional similarity between Heidegger and Marcuse is that both have a special affinity for art as a revolutionary undertaking within society. The early, hopeful Heidegger proclaims, "essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other,

[816] Ibid, P. 17.
[817] Ibid, P. 169.

fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art."[818] To Heidegger, if there were to be a great savior of society in the midst of the technological threat, it would be found in artistic expression and articulation: *poiēsis*. Initially, Marcuse accepts this position emphatically, arguing that art is "…a rational, cognitive force, revealing a dimension of man and nature which was repressed and repelled in reality…[Its] truth [is] in the illusion evoked, in the insistence on creating a world in which the terror of life was called up and suspended…."[819] For Marcuse, art *sublimates* reality by creating new dimensions—"higher" dimensions—that extend beyond mere economic necessities, and are therefore revolutionary as they harbor the social dimensions needed to employ self and institutional critique.[820]

However, despite his praises, Marcuse claims that technological rationality and organization has "invalidated"[821] art by transforming "…their subversive force, their destructive content—their truth" into "familiar goods and services."[822] Effectively, the technological society transforms the revolutionary powers of art into simply another part of the social mechanism. This transformation occurs to the point that, in Marcuse's words, "The music of the soul [becomes] the music of salesmanship."[823] To Marcuse, art is no longer that which subverts oppressive forces within society, but rather it is tamed to fit within, even reinforce, those

[818] Heidegger, P. 35.
[819] ODM, P. 61.
[820] Ibid, P. 58.
[821] Ibid, P. 61.
[822] Ibid.
[823] Ibid, P. 57.

oppressive forces.[824] It is this process through which art becomes a part of the oppressive system that Marcuse calls "Repressive Desublimation."[825]

Through his analysis of Repressive Desublimation, Marcuse destroys the last thread that kept the early Heidegger hopeful and now seemingly enters into the fatalistic nightmare of the late Heidegger and Ellul. Feenberg argues, "[Marcuse's] theory subverts itself by canceling the idea of transcending action and appears to reinstate the fatalism of a Heidegger or an Ellul."[826] That transcending action of artistic expression is now enveloped into the machine and no longer serves the proletariat, but rather the economic powers who control them.

C. One-Dimensional World

Marcuse's final indictment on the technological society is an examination of the kind of world that remains after technological rationality and Repressive Desublimation have consumed society and the individual. For Marcuse, the once two-dimensional individual and society has now become "flattened-out" so as to become one, no longer maintaining a critical element derived from that which was once sublimated. He calls it a "liquidation" of the two dimensions that "takes place not through the denial and rejection of the 'cultural values,' but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale."[827] The one-dimensional society has no negations, no aliens, and no critical elements. "The 'other dimension' is absorbed into the prevailing state of affairs…Thus [the

[824] An example of repressive desublimation is found in the evolution of the content of certain musical genres. In his article, "The Death and Life of Punk," (in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. by David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2003. P. 235), Dylan Clark describes this pattern when he states, "Even punk [music], when reduced to a neat Mohawk hairstyle and a studded leather jacket, could be made into a cleaned-up spokesman for potato chips. Suddenly, the language of punk was rendered meaningless."
[825] Ibid, P. 72.
[826] Feenberg, P. 75.
[827] Marcuse, P. 57.

other dimensions] become commercials—they sell, comfort, or excite."[828] All avenues which would otherwise be the fertile grounds from which proletarian revolution would grow are co-opted by the technological society, leaving the human with a false sense of happiness.

The individual within this society, lacking any critical dimension from which to pull, is left to establish in itself what Marcuse calls, "The Happy Consciousness." Marcuse states, "Just as this society tends to reduce, and even absorb opposition…in the realm of politics and higher culture, so it does in the instinctual sphere. The result is the atrophy of the mental organs for grasping the contradictions and the alternatives and, in the one remaining dimension of technological rationality, the *Happy Consciousness* comes to prevail."[829] For Marcuse, the human has lost one's capacity to be uneasy about their own social, spiritual and psychological condition. The human, acting as a reified thing, no longer experiences guilt, self-criticism, or ethical consideration.[830] The outer, negative dimension is lost and, therefore, the "true conscience" is lost. Without any alternative picture, the human embodies a "Happy Conscience," void of self-criticism and aware of but one mode of reality, which is essentially naïve to any need for self or institutional evaluation.

For Marcuse, the one-dimensional society creates the one-dimensional individual. From self-consciousness and ethical deliberation, even to sexuality,[831] the individual has become primed for exploitation and integration within the technological society. For Marcuse, there is no self in the machine. The self has become reified, desublimated, and flattened-out to merge

[828] Ibid, P. 64.
[829] Ibid, P. 79.
[830] Ibid., P. 79-81.
[831] For more information on this topic of one-dimensional sexuality, see ODM, P. 74-78. Two important aspects that he covers deal with sexuality turning into repression and aggression (P. 76-78), and the growing acceptability of sexual "misdeeds" (P. 76).

with the machine through rationalizing elements that create, maintain, correct, and operate the machine.

II: Ethical Implications of Marcuse's Easy Conscience in the Technological Society

While Marcuse establishes a logically forceful argument regarding the "flattening out" and pacifying effects of an economically directed technological society, his anthropology as expressed as an easy conscience limits his ability to prescribe a realistic way forward. As demonstrated at the end of Chapter 3, there are two consequences of the easy conscience: first, the easy conscience obscures one's perception of the world, culminating in unrealistic attempts to save oneself from its various evils; second, while the easy conscience assuages the tensions necessary to discover evil at the center of human personality, it cannot assuage the existential tensions of human nature which create anxiety—the condition for sin. This section will address how Marcuse's anthropology leads to both unrealistic solutions, and an ignored and compounded form of anxiety in its final state, and will do so under the following headings: (A) Obscured World; Unrealistic Salvation and (B) Compounded Anxiety.

A. Obscured World; Unrealistic Salvation

As established in the previous chapter, for Marcuse, the proletariat is alienated and fractured, in need of an historical push forward to reconcile oneself with one's work and the objective world that surrounds the alienated self. While it was at one point presumed that history would eventually create the conflicts necessary to arrive at unification and liberation, Marcuse and the Frankfurt School perceive a lull in the materialistic dialectic. Marcuse sees technological rationality as the primary force that is causing this lull, as one's very reason is co-opted by the bourgeoise and held in place by a false sense of happiness that removes the negative thinking necessary to energize the proletariat towards revolutionary ends. Thus, in order to understand

Marcuse's coming ethical prescriptions, it is important to know that he articulates evil as a problem which is of historical and rational origin. However, while the historical evils will eventually take care of themselves, new forms of salvation are necessary in the rational realm in order for the historical dialectic to proceed.

This section will be divided into three parts. First, (1) this section will describe Marcuse's various rational forms of salvation, as expressed in his use of three key thinkers: early Marx, Heidegger, and Freud, and their culmination into his larger social project, "The Great Refusal." Second, (2) this section will effectively "zoom out" to show how Marcuse's project of salvation should be understood on the basis of his Hegelian presumptions. Finally, (3) this section will devise a Niebuhrian critique of Marcuse's forms of salvation on the basis of his easy conscience.

1. Revolutionary Voices and the Great Refusal

While Marcuse utilizes three different thinkers to generate the basis for his *negative thinking*, he essentially uses them all for the same purposes: to prod the proletariat towards a new vision of self and rationality in order to propel revolutionary energies towards the ultimate goal of revolution and liberation. Though different in language, Marcuse utilizes early Marx, Heidegger, and Freud in similar ways, and the result—he hopes—is an artistic take-over of culture in what he calls, "the Great Refusal," which will provide the cultural conditions necessary to establish "True Consciousness" and, eventually, revolution and liberation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the proletariat needs a new form of reason that can generate the proper dimension to jolt forward the dialectic. Originally, Marcuse turns to early Marx, particularly his theses on Feuerbach, in order to "correct" the basis from which Marxists

traditionally understand Marx's epistemology, and to do so on grounds of Marx's use of the terms *sensuousness* and *needs*. As described in Chapter 6, Marx's early understanding of sensuousness was a synthesis of Hegel's ideological dialectic and Feurbach's position that "The Object, in its true meaning, is given only by the senses…the proper organon of philosophy;"[832] in other words, the purely passive form of reasoning as granted through sheer observation and experience of nature. The two for early Marx, and by extension, Marcuse, is a form of sensuousness that integrates the subjective experience into the objective, materialistic world—the subject is a participant in the formation of objective reality. This synthesis is ultimately what early Marx calls "praxis," and Marcuse will take liberties by such a formulation by extending this concept and applying it to the broader corpus of Marxist literature. This effectively frees Marcuse's subject to both be a product and shaper of history, and grants the proletariat rational space from which to influence the historical process.

However, this rational space is co-opted by the bourgeoise in the form of technological rationality, and the very freedom which the subject has in the historical process has been flattened out to fit within the "one-dimensional," technological society. What is needed, according to Marcuse, is a rational liberation—a form of *negative thinking*—as understood in its most natural and dialectical (negation included) state; "The liberation of man," Marcuse argues, "requires the liberation of nature, of man's natural existence."[833] It is a form of *sensuousness* as opposed to technological rationality. It is for this reason that Marcuse turns to Heidegger and Freud for the dual purpose of discovering the true nature of human beings so as to establish what he calls "right thinking" and "True Consciousness" as a form of *sensuousness*.

[832] RAR, P. 271.
[833] Ibid., P. 269.

First, Marcuse turns to Heidegger to establish the categories of "inauthenticity" and "authenticity." Heidegger's view of the individual as "inauthentic" is one who is "…dominated by social forces, conforms to standard modes of behavior and…loses individuality and autonomy failing to develop one's powers of creativity, will, responsibility, etc."[834] Already, this inauthentic self appears strikingly similar to Marcuse's reified, technologically rational self; the human is "inauthentic" in that he or she has lost their individuality and autonomy. Therefore, for Marcuse, it is appropriate to borrow its inverse term as a resolution: the "authentic self." However, the "authentic" self is spurred to action only by the realization of the "inauthentic." The "inauthentic" harbors the task within itself of returning to "authenticity," of "taking a stand on itself"[835] and essentially *becoming* the bearer of radical action.[836] Therefore, the Great Revolution must be preceded by a revolution in the self, to become what is *negative* in the present; to change one's very being. For Marcuse, one's understanding of one's authentic self emerges at the very moment the inauthentic self is broken. Marcuse states, "Knowledge of one's own historicity and concrete (authentic) historical existence becomes possible at the moment when existence itself breaks through reification."[837] To discover authenticity within inauthenticity is to break the spell of technological rationality.

However, Marcuse abandons this language of Heidegger relatively early in his career, perhaps because, as Feenberg suggests, his "early attempts at concretization [of the authentic self] appear as arbitrary as Heidegger's."[838] He essentially remains too vague. Whatever the

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[834] Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, P. 44.
[835] Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2001), P. 173
[836] Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), P. 146.
[837] Marcuse, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse: Volume Three*, Douglas Kellner (ed.), (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), P. 32.
[838] Feenberg, "Heidegger and Marcuse," P. 174.

case may be, Marcuse moves to another form of expression—one that can embody the subjectivity of sensuousness without sliding into abstraction and betraying the objectivity and concreteness of his materialism. For this reason, Marcuse turns to the psychoanalysis of Freud.

Marcuse hopes to find in a Freud a "metapsychology" that can grant the necessary dimension of reason for revolutionary change, which is perhaps lying dormant deep within the human psyche, and below the iron cage of technological rationality. This will provide what he calls "instinctual liberation," which is a "pre-rational" form of reason that is exclusively built upon "true needs" as opposed to "false needs."[839] He essentially argues, similar to Mumford, that a psychological reorientation towards one's basic needs—as opposed to false needs—is necessary to rejuvenate the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat. It is about reinforcing what one actually needs to live, rather than that which corrupts one's reason. However, it should be noted that the "true needs" he conceptualizes is akin to a new form of piety, and presses against his otherwise materialistic conception of the self by forming a new metaphysic that articulates ethics from a spiritually extracted position.[840]

Finally, whether it is envisioned through *sensuousness* and *need*, the *authentic self*, or the ethic of *true need*, Marcuse seeks to establish a new form of society alongside the development of these new forms of *negative thinking*. To achieve this, and despite his own critique of Repressive Desublimation, Marcuse seeks a Hegelian mediation—a way of instilling and perpetuating his theory of the negation within the proletariat, or an "explication of

[839] EAC, P. 32.
[840] In his essay, "Marcuse, human nature, and the foundations of ethical norms" (*Philosophy & Social Criticism* Vol. 34 No. 3, 2008. P. 268), Jeff Noonan argues convincingly that Marcuse is only using Freud to establish a new metaphysic that betrays his materialism.

revolution"[841]—through the channels of artistic expression and cultural application. Mostly playing off his definition of art as a kind of four-dimensional "stylized reality," in opposition to the technologically efficient reality, [842] Marcuse implores the artists of his day that the "luxury function of art must be destroyed" in order to negate the repressive desublimation now holding art hostage, and argues that "The protest of the artist becomes passionate, socially critical analysis."[843] Marcuse envisions that this mass artistic revolution—what he calls the "Great Refusal"—will become "a social force for the *transformation of reality*," and the "possible artistic formation of the lifeworld."[844] The grounds for revolution will be a mutually reinforcing social structure of *negative thinking* (sensuousness, authenticity, or true need), artistic expression, and cultural refusal of the economic powers that reign in the technological realm.

2. Marcuse's Easy Hegelian Rationalism

If Marcuse's sources of salvation seem at all unrealistic or confused, it is perhaps to do with the fact that his underlying philosophical structure is deeply unrealistic and confused. Marcuse's easy conscience, particularly his overly rationalistic presuppositions juxtaposed with his overly materialistic presuppositions, obscures his ability to generate realistic solutions to the technological society, presuming that all it should take is a rational or psychological reorientation towards *negative thinking* to set history back on its appropriate path towards liberation. However, this problem begins, not with his uses of early Marx, Heidegger, Freud, or the Great Refusal, but rather his misreading of Hegel, particularly his concept of "mediation."

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[841] David Kettler, "A Note on the Aesthetic Dimension in Marcuse's Social Theory," *Political Theory* Vol. 10 No. 2 (May 1982): P. 268.
[842]Herbert Marcuse, "Society as a Work of Art" trans. John Abromeit, in *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Vol. 4* (ed. Douglas Kellner, New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2007), P. 125.
[843] Ibid., P. 126.
[844] Ibid., P. 128.

In order to fully appreciate the impact that his misreading of Hegel had on his concepts of salvation, one must understand the fundamental paradox at the center of his situation. On the one hand, like others in the Frankfurt School, Marcuse must depart from the Marxist failures that would necessitate the development of Critical Theory, but still maintain certain grounding tenets that remain true to the Marxist project. For reasons previously discussed, Marcuse still maintains three important doctrines of Marx: (1) The purely materialist composition of human nature, (2) the materialist dialectic of history, and (3) the ultimate goal of emancipation for the proletariat. However, on the other hand, Marcuse will seek salvation for the proletariat in philosophical observations and concepts that were established within radically different perceptions of self than those Marxist doctrines. Nowhere except through a narrow reading of early Marx does Marcuse find room in the heavily materialistic and sociologically defined view of humanity and history to establish a position that generates enough dimension to discover revolutionary energies in what he now sees as a rationally-co-opted space of being; and even then, it is only through outside perspectives with radically different presuppositions about history and nature that he can he express a revolutionary figure. He effectively seeks salvation from another paradigm's savior. While this process of discovering a revolutionary agent within a failed/stalled materialistic dialectic caused others to eventually retreat into pessimism,[845] Marcuse's insistence upon the truth of the dialectic forged him deeper into utopian visions, propelled by ideations which would continually betray his Marxist anthropology. He attempts to draw out the revolutionary dimensions of the self, in the words of John M. Swomley, "…like so many rabbits, out of the hat of materialism."[846]

[845] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, P. 506.
[846] John M. Swomley, Jr., *American Empire* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1971), P. 35.

Despite his varying attempts to "mediate" *negative thinking* to the proletariat (early Marx, Heidegger, Freud, Great Refusal), the problem with his forms of salvation lie in the Hegelian concept of mediation itself. From the beginning, his concept of mediation is essentially the attempt to impart [negative] ideology upon historically and materialistically-bound receptacles; to instill that which is by his own definition non-existent into a world where such categories or relationships do not exist. To understand how this concept makes his forms of salvation unrealistic, it is important to understand Marcuse's misreading of Marx and Hegel, and how such a misreading leads him to arrive at such a construction.

When Marcuse retreats to the early writings of Marx, he makes the mistake of believing, as Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, that "Marx had a single and unchanging doctrine which is expounded in all these works."[847] In other words, he made a mistake very early on of assuming that somehow hidden within Marx's fully developed thought were these Hegelian presuppositions of abstract mediation put forward exclusively within Marx's early works in the form of, according to Marcuse, a type of *negative thinking* expressed in the concepts of *sensuousness* and *need*.

To be clear, Marx rejected the idea that abstract mediation—the idea that one could take a concept that is *not* reflected in reality and impose it as an ideology—was possible in the materialist dialectic. In his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," Marx makes clear his position against such Hegelian, abstract mediation: "It is strange that Hegel, who reduces the absurdity of mediation to its abstract, logical, and therefore unadulterated, unique expression, describes it at the same time as the *speculative mystery* of logic, as the rational

[847] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1970), P. 34. Parenthetical term added for clarification.

relationship, as the syllogism of reason."[848] He goes on to explain the necessary physicality of such an expression of negation, and seemingly calls out those who may come after, like Marcuse, who uphold an abstract form of mediation in his own dialectical materialism. He states, "The one does not have in its own bosom the longing for, the need for, the anticipation of the other."[849] In other words, Marx would have roundly rejected Marcuse's central claim that "The absent must be made present because the greater part of the truth is in that which is absent."[850] The negative is not somewhere hidden abstractly in or outside the proletariat. The abstract negative, according to Marx, has no place in the physical realm. Therefore, according to Marx himself, Marcuse's attempt to establish revolutionary energies from the idealized forms of *sensuousness*, authenticity, or "true need" are impossible. Non-existence does not imply existence.

Nevertheless, while taking this liberty of imbuing Marx's early writings with a Hegelian, abstract mediation, Marcuse went far in assuring that he was still very much inbounds within the Marxist project. However, it also led him to ignore the very real possibility that Marx left these Hegelian views behind for a reason. This mistake will complicate Marcuse's fidelity to materialism, as his newly acquired Hegelian dialectic will grow beyond what is permissible within the Marxist project.

Furthermore, Marcuse's error of reading Hegel's abstract mediation into early Marx—and by extension, the entire Marxist project—was accompanied by a particularly unorthodox reading of Hegel himself. The earliest Hegelian expositors, writing immediately after his death,

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[848] Karl Marx, *Marx & Engles: Collected Works: Volume 3*, James S. Allen, Philip S. Foner, Dirk J. Struik, William W. Weinstone (ed., tr.), (USA: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), P. 88.
[849] Ibid.
[850] Marcuse, *The Essential Frankfurt School,* P. 448.

were divided on the issue of the relationship—or non-relationship—between categories of thought (affirmation/negation; thesis/antithesis) and the temporal and natural world.[851] This divide was based primarily on a disagreement over whether it was the case that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* should be treated as a fully matured work, and whether his later and more systematic publication, *Science of Logic*, was either the culmination or the unnecessary abstraction of *Phenomenology.*[852] Those who treated *Phenomenology* as its own end and disregarded *Logic* stressed "…that the categories [of dialectic] are antecedent to nature and to history" and that "the Absolute Idea could never be reduced to its temporal and finite manifestations."[853] In other words, they treated Hegel as a rationalism, creating and maintaining categories of affirmation and negation to be applied, but never fully realized, within nature.

On the other hand, those who read *Phenomenology* as an immature work and treated *Logic* as the full maturation of Hegelian thought stressed "…that this antecedence is only logical and not temporal, and that the categories have no existence apart from their embodiment in the world of experience."[854] To these Hegelian expositors, there is a full relationship between the world of experience and the Hegelian categories of dialectic.

However, Marcuse will create a strange combination of both views by reading *Logic*—the later text—back into *Phenomenology.* In other words, working backwards, Marcuse takes the more abstract, systematic, and logical themes of Hegel, and applies them to the more concrete and material observations held within *Phenomenology*. Marcuse claims, "The foundations of the absolute knowledge that the *Phenomenology of Mind* presents as the truth of

[851] MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse,* P. 31-32.
[852] Ibid., P. 31.
[853] Ibid.
[854] Ibid.

the world are given in Hegel's *Science of Logic*…."[855] He is essentially saying that the foundations for material and concrete truth are discovered within Hegel's abstract conception of the Absolute Idea. Therefore, in a unique conflation of the previous Hegelian disagreements, Marcuse affirms the view that the categories of the dialectic (*negations* included) are antecedent to nature and history, but denies that the Absolute Idea cannot manifest concretely. This begets to Marcuse what MacIntyre calls, "…the possibility of absolutizing and *deifying* tendencies in the present other than those which Hegel approved."[856] This misreading allows Marcuse to treat Hegel's categories—particularly the concept of negation—as a divine mandate upon history; that negations are present, even as they are seemingly absent.

This new reading of Hegel will seem to provide for Marcuse the freedom and power necessary for the proletariat to consider possibilities outside the given realm of technological rationality. The "deified" categories Marcuse now presents can be conjured from the full imagination of the subject, and can be accomplished without a necessary material referent. This is how Marcuse can claim that a "negative" in the dialectic exists even as the proletariat is "happy." What will unfold is the basis for Marcuse's critique: the negation is always present as a referent to truth (liberation), even when it is not empirically verifiable;[857] which is diametrically opposed to Marx's insistence that "The one does not have in its own bosom the longing for, the need for, the anticipation of the other."[858] Effectively, Marcuse's unique construction of Hegel gives license to break with the material world in order to correct it.

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[855] RAR, P. 120.
[856] MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse,* P. 34. Emphasis added.
[857] In his article, "Marcuse's critical theory of modernity" (*Philosophy & Social Criticism* Vol. 34 No. 9, 2008: P. 1076) Espen Hammer states, "…Marcuse offers no real account of the empirical dynamics that may lead to the radical social change he envisions."
[858] Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, P. 88.

It must be stressed that, given traditional Marxism and Marx himself, Marcuse's use of Hegel is committing the worst possible error by applying an imagined ideology—something which necessarily does not exist—to the concrete world. Marx states in his essay "The German Ideology" (1845), "The phantoms formed in the human brain too, are necessary sublimations of man's material life-process which is empirically verifiable and connected with the material premises."[859] For this more fully matured Marx—as opposed to the vague, early Marx—there is no logical or rational antecedent to nature; logic and reason are birthed *from* nature. While such a statement as this from Marx does not exist within those early works upon which Marcuse relies so heavily, it is apparent that Marx would fully refute Marcuse's new take on Hegel. Espen Hammer appropriately asks, "How can Marcuse's concept…avoid the charge, which Marx made against so many of his contemporary socialists, of abstraction and empty idealism?"[860]

3. Niebuhrian Critique

The Niebuhrian response to Marcuse's salvation of *negative thinking* by way of Hegelian mediation is unified in the observation that Marcuse's proletariat is far too pathetic to embody the revolutionary spirit he seeks to conjure, and far too pathetic to be ethically responsible for the evil discovered in the technological society. Ironically, his pathetic conception of the human—one who is a slave to both history and technological rationality—achieves for Marcuse an easy conscience that deadens any attempt to right what is wrong in the technological society by removing fault from those who most need to right its wrongs. Marcuse's proletariat is pathetic enough to be an historical and rational victim upon whom evil is imposed, but is somehow savvy enough to attain a full understanding of the rational nature of one's bondage in order to

[859] Marx & Engels, "The German Ideology" in *Selected Writings*, P. 112.
[860] Hammer, P. 1076.

overcome that victimhood. This irony is compounded on both sides of his dialectic: the more materialistic his view of history and the more rationally bound his proletariat seems, the more spiritual, idealistic, and unrealistic his sources of salvation must become.

The contrast of the easy conscience of the historically-bound proletariat with the grandiose, utopian vision of the Marxist project—while more spiritually devised in the work of Marcuse—is nothing new in the Marxist quest to unify the proletariat with one's labor. However, it is important to note that such a construction has always led towards a destructive impulse that lies at the center of the Marxist project: a spiritualized proletariat in conflict with one's own natural and historical restraints. In Niebuhrian terms, the failure of the Marxist project is best described as the Christian conception of pride: "…when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance." [861]

For Niebuhr, the easy conscience expressed in the Marxist understanding of the proletariat—the myth of victimhood at the heart of their conception—is misguided and ignores the proletariat's very real capacity for evil when the Marxist project is fully matured. Niebuhr states, "The poor are not actually as disinterested and pure as the Marxist apocalypse assumes…their bitterness and their compensatory utopian visions may as frequently be sources of confusion as the social pride of the successful."[862] Though seemingly justified by their situation, their moral righteousness harbors within it the great capacity to recapitulate the very injustices they experience. Niebuhr states, "…those who suffer from the arrogance or the power of others wrongfully assume that the evils from which they suffer are solely the consequences of

[861] NDHN, P. 186.
[862] IAH, P. 164.

the peculiar malice of their oppressors; and fail to recognize the root of the same evil in themselves."[863]

While Marcuse expresses the Marxist project with an added dimension of a fallen, technological rationality, the easy conscience he is endorsing at the heart of the Marxist struggle establishes within his construction the same fundamental error: the pathetic are also righteous, and the pathetic have the capacity and moral justification to instill in the materialistic and historically-bound world a vision of ideological liberation. This vision, however, is disproportional to the natural and historical constraints that he himself established (reification/repressive desublimation/one-dimensionality). Marcuse effectively spiritualizes the cause of the proletariat by seeking its eventual revolution in the form of an abstracted ideology.

The spiritualization of the proletariat's cause, too, seems to be a recapitulation of past Marxist failures. Niebuhr argues that the Communism of his time was nothing more than a modern secular religion. He states, "Communism is a religion within the framework of a modern secular culture in which the 'logic of history' takes the place of Allah as the absolute source of meaning, and the writings of Marx and Lenin become the sacred texts, analogous to the Koran."[864] Similarly, Marcuse wields Hegel's categories like a fundamentalist wields a holy book. His Hegelian interpretation—and by extension, his use of early Marx, Heidegger, and Freud—is a spiritualized, deified logic which antecedes nature, and which he now seeks to impose upon the world in the most radical form.

Furthermore, Niebuhr had suspicions that despite Marx's apparent "materialistically referential" logic, that there was still a movement of the subject that was unjustifiably imposed

[863] Ibid.
[864] Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), P. 117.

upon the objective world. For Niebuhr, Communism was the complete affirmation of this suspicion. Niebuhr states:

> The Marxian imagines that he has a philosophy or even a science of history. What he has is really an apocalyptic vision. A confident prophecy of the future is never more than that. In him political hopes achieve religious proportions by overleaping the bounds of rationally verifiable possibilities….There is something both sublime and ridiculous in…expecting the disinherited to conquer either by virtue of their moral qualities or by virtue of their very disinheritance.[865]

According to Niebuhr, the categories of virtue, no matter how conceived—inheritance and disinheritance, affirmation and negation—create an undue spiritualization of theory, despite Marx and Engel's insistence upon a philosophical fidelity to the material world.

Effectively, Niebuhr's critique of what is implicit in Marx is now explicit in Marcuse: Marcuse's deified Hegelianism, his abstract *negative thinking*, is nothing more than a modern secular religion. For all his attempts to gain dimension for the "one-dimensional man," the process for integrating each thinker—early Marx, Heidegger, and Freud—into his Marxist anthropology is nothing more than an attempt to find a materialist agent who can receive a spiritualized utopia. Regarding his Great Refusal, his efforts to describe and impose this as a utopian ideal would remain unrealistic and "indeterminate,"[866] as even Marcuse himself admits that "Nothing concrete can be said in anticipation of such a form except that it is contained as a possibility within the dynamic of the present society."[867] In other words, Marcuse's fidelity to both a materialistically and historically-bound proletariat on the one hand, and an abstract idealism on the other, disables him from imposing any realistic change from the perspective of the negation. The subject is free enough to imagine, yet too bound to act and create.

[865] MMIS, P. 155-156.
[866] Arato & Gebhardt, P. 220.
[867] Herbert Marcuse, "Society as a Work of Art," P. 129.

The irony of Marcuse's deification of categories is that he is essentially proposing a Rationalisation of his own; he is proposing an iron cage of Hegelian categories, elaborated within the infinite potentialities of the human mind, to be imposed upon society in its effort to defend it from an equally abstracted technological rationality. While Marcuse toys with the more existential and psychoanalytic ideas of Heidegger and Freud, it is absolutely imperative to understand that what he is proposing is nothing more than Hegelian rationalism reconfigured to impose upon Marx's materialistic world a utopian society—a cosmic invasion of his deified imagination. Ironically, Marcuse's attempt to decry reason results in his full embrace of its highest and most abstracted form.

From the Niebuhrian perspective, Marcuse's dramatic embrace of a deified Hegelianism is prideful. The permanently fractured self—fractured in terms of its subjectivity and objectivity, its transcendence and creatureliness—will always desire asylum in one completely when insecurity is detected in the other.[868] Niebuhr claims that if "nature is regarded as a realm of chaos, the realm of reason is an easily accessible asylum from, and force of conquest over, the conflicts and disharmonies of nature."[869] Marcuse has little choice but to incorporate a spiritualized negation—a "true consciousness"—into the Marxist dialectic; to overwhelm the technological society with the cogency of his critique. However, Marcuse's insistence upon such a flattened out, historically materialistic view of self would necessitate a rational leap into a fully sublimated reality to call down from his ideology salvation for the proletariat.

[868] NDHN, P. 95-96.
[869] Ibid., P. 96.

A curious truth about the Marxist dialectic, particularly as expressed in its stringent materialism, is that around every turn, from the failed bureaucracies of the Soviet Union,[870] to the technological rationality that now, according to Marcuse, threatens humankind, the Marxist self is perpetually at risk of becoming swallowed up into an absolute, and consistently diminishes its freedom in the attempt to more fully affirm it. Even Marcuse's hope of salvation is placed in the proletariat becoming swallowed up and absorbed into a more liberating absolute form of reason. Reasoning within his illusory dialectic of meaning, whether it considers a loss of self which is a product of its own idealism (Soviet Union), a description of the obstacle in its way (technological rationalism), or even unto his own form of salvation, Marxism—and Marcuse by extension—must always express a hollowed-out perception of a human who is dwarfed in the shadow of its ideal. However, according to Niebuhr, the objective world will never perfectly conform to the subjective, and the human's transcendent faculties will never perfectly instruct the creature. The human must permanently remain unresolved, or perceived within a principle of faith which houses the tensions of that unresolved state.

B. Anxiety in the Self

As this thesis previously established in Chapter 3 and continued to elaborate in the context of Mumford (Chapter 5), anxiety is an inevitable condition of the human situation. The human is at once endowed with seemingly infinite capacities of imagination and spirit, yet can never fully establish that which he or she imagines in the finite realm of existence. There always appears to be a subject/object divide. While some thinkers—Mumford and Marcuse included—

[870] In his book, *Soviet Marxism* (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1961. P. 204), Marcuse critiques the Soviet Union's dehuminization, noting that its "centralization and regimentation supersede individual enterprise and autonomy; competition is organized and 'rationalized'; there is joint rule of economic and political bureaucracies; the people are co-ordinated through the 'mass media' of communication, entertainment industry, education…"

may attempt to assuage the human condition through a construction of self that inadvertently creates the easy conscience, anxiety is never assuaged. The purpose of this section is to show how Marcuse's anthropology—his expression of an easy conscience—compounds anxiety through his premature solutions regarding the problems of the self.

As demonstrated in his failure to discover clear revolutionary subjects, there exists within Marcuse's work an anxious note. The twin traps of a deified Hegelianism and a Marxist materialism create within Marcuse's proletariat the conflict of a transcendent mind in constant war with a pathetic creature. Often, Marcuse speaks of the ideal like a prophet calling down from a mountain; other times, Marcuse is a caged animal groaning his lamentations from behind the iron bars of his critique. On either occasion, Marcuse's project is doomed to face a compounded form of anxiety from the outset.

In his work, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*, Larry Hickman makes an astute observation regarding Marcuse: "Marcuse's own program," Hickman argues, "despite its good intentions, ultimately remains utopian at best, *debilitated by its vagueness***.**"[871] This is an important observation for two reasons—that which it states explicitly, and that which it exposes implicitly regarding his anxious state. First, this statement explicitly spells out the two weaknesses of Marcuse: his utopianism and his vagueness. Second, however, and despite Hickman's apparent inability to express this irony, it is precisely Marcuse's utopianism that necessitates his vagueness; the two are mutually reinforced. The more utopian Marcuse becomes, the more vague and unrealistic his revolutionary subjects must also become. His ideal revolutionary proletariat must become more and more vague in order to house the enormity of

[871] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture,* P. 166. Emphasis added.

Marcuse's ambitions, despite the proletariat's presumed weaknesses. These two poles of his thought—the utopian vision and the vague revolutionary subject—complicate one another the more fully either is analyzed, manifesting in an anxious and "frenzied search in the social periphery for potential revolutionary subjects…."[872]

Perhaps in no other work does Marcuse reach such a fever pitch of anxiety as that of *One-Dimensional Man*. In fact, a recent discovery of an early draft of the work demonstrated a dramatic shift in trajectories, oscillating between his more optimistic ideal and his more pessimistic resignation.[873] Effectively, Marcuse could not decide between his utopian dreams and his dystopian nightmare. Ultimately, the work settled in its final published version rather pessimistically, resting complete hope upon the vague notion of some "outsider" who may or may not propel the revolutionary vision forward.[874] Indeed, this wavering is not only indicative of Marcuse's apparent angst, but equally as important, his incoherence regarding the self. In his article, "Do Universals Have A Reference?" Matthew Sharpe rightly asks of Marcuse, "Where does the critical theorist speak from, when he denounces capitalism? To what do his categories refer, and from whence can they have come, if not their own social order?"[875] Is the self within or outside the dominating structure? Does the human transcend current realities or is he or she helplessly crushed underneath? This is what ultimately remains vague, and thus allows his utopian vision to persist. Marcuse cannot decide to what degree the human is an object or a subject; he cannot decide if it is history which shall correct the rational realm now sickened by

[872] Arato & Gebhardt, P. xvi.
[873] Marc Parry, "Newly Discovered Draft of Marcuse Book Reveals Turn Toward Pessimism" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (30 September, 2013), P. 1-4.
[874] ODM, P. 256
[875] Matthew Sharpe, "Do Universals Have A Reference? On the Critical Theory of Herbert Marcuse" (*Philosophy Today* Vol. 46 Iss. 2, Summer 2002: P. 196).

technological rationality, or if it is a new form of reason which shall correct history through sensuousness, the authentic self, or his Freudian conception of "true need."

However, according to Niebuhr, it does not matter which side of the spectrum the self is situated for Marxist anthropology. Speaking on this tendency to waver between transcendent and creaturely positions of the self, Niebuhr states:

> Whether they found the path from chaos to order to lead from nature to reason or from reason to nature, whether they regarded the harmony of nature or the coherence of mind as the final realm of redemption, they failed to understand the human spirit in its full dimension of freedom. Both the majesty and the tragedy of human life exceed the dimension within which modern culture seeks to comprehend human existence.[876]

No matter which direction leads to utopia—history to reason or reason to history—the self is ultimately flattened in its very process to find liberation precisely because it highly regards one aspect of its fissured nature while completely disregarding the other.

Notwithstanding, while Marcuse's critique of technological rationality engages in a "dangerous flirtation with a substantive theory of technology,"[877] it should be admitted that Marcuse does not fully resort to the complete pessimism of Heidegger, Ellul, or others in the Frankfurt School. On the one hand, Adorno ultimately submits to the belief that "the human problem is insoluble in history,"[878] despite his similar treatment of Hegel.[879] On the other hand, Horkheimer "was consistently drawn to reflection on religion through his life *in response to limitations he perceived within Marxist theory and practice.*"[880] The manner in which each

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[876] NDHN, P. 122.
[877] Feenberg, P. 75.
[878] Taylor, P. 506.
[879] While Adorno indeed constructed Hegel on similar grounds in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he ultimately rejected the idea on the basis that the "transcendent critique" houses a "more secret characteristic," which is "its hidden affinity for barbarism." Gebhardt notes, "In his last major opus, Adorno specifically locates Marcuse's critique of affirmative culture in this dangerous neighborhood (Arato & Gebhardt, P. 205)."
[880] Christopher Craig Brittain, "Social Theory and the Premise of all Criticism: Max Horkheimer on Religion," *Critical Sociology* Vol. 31 Iss. 1-2 (2005): P. 153. Emphasis added.

thinker responded to the anxiety of such a transcendent self over and against such a lowly materialistic being was not unlike the respective resignations of Heidegger and Ellul described in the first chapter: one submits to absolute pessimism, while the other flirts with a theory of mystical escapism. However, all four essentially end their projects with the final conclusion of Heidegger: "Only a God can save us now."[881]

Ultimately, Marcuse is, at least in one way, admirable in that he keeps pressing on in this "frenzied" state to discover prospective emancipating subjects (early Marx, Heidegger, Freud, the "outsider"). However, on the other hand, and in a Niebuhrian sense, he is *pathetic* if not *tragic* in that he is perennially existing within the anxious state of liberating that which cannot be liberated, unifying that which cannot be unified.[882] This to Niebuhr is the definition of the sinful nature, or the anxious conditions antecedent to Christian sin. He states, "Original sin is that thing about man which makes him capable of conceiving of his own perfection and incapable of achieving it."[883] Marcuse, throughout his career, is experiencing the perpetual interruption of his own fractured self. He is consistently running towards ideals which continue to affirm the Niebuhrian critique that "our reach is beyond our grasp."[884]

Niebuhr's objection to Marcuse rests in his inability to ever find serenity within the tensions of human consciousness, which would establish a realistic way forward for Marcuse by generating an acceptance for what society could never change in history, yet a courage to make proximal changes within the scope of one's modest and limited power. Marcuse spends his career busied with failed grand illusion after failed grand illusion, but never finds in the failures

[881] *Der Spiegel*, "Only a God can Save Us Now."
[882] For more on Niebuhr's understanding of the pathetic and tragic, see: *NDHN,* P. 11; IOAH, introduction.
[883] IAH, P. 84.
[884] Ibid., P. 6.

the resources for change. Much like Mumford, Marcuse believes all must be changed or nothing at all. His insistence upon both the ideal and the utterly failed state of human kind leaves no avenue for recourse; only pessimism, optimism, or the anxious frenzy in between.

Ultimately, the self is both less free and more free than Marcuse imagines. The self is less free in that one's higher faculties—one's ability to transcend history—are never quite powerful and transcendent enough to ever fully create the conditions for its own unification—its own liberation. However, the self is more free than Marcuse assumes, because it has more dimension than what can be conceivably controlled by history or society. The self can imagine beyond its current place in history, even if it is influenced to a degree by technological rationality. There is a transcendent dimension of self which is both established long before and still exists deep within the development and adoption of Rationalisation, reification, or technological rationality.

Chapter 8: Technological Ambiguity and the Uneasy Conscience

Introduction

While the previous four chapters undertook the prophetic and apologetic method to expose the easy conscience at the center of Mumford and Marcuse's anthropologies, and subsequently showed how that easy conscience complicates each thinker's ethical prescriptions for the technological society, this chapter will achieve the primary goal of this thesis: to construct a synthesis of the work of Niebuhr, Mumford, and Marcuse in order to create a new type of technological engagement from the basis of an uneasy conscience.

In keeping with the goal of this chapter, this chapter will culminate to present its unique contribution to scholarship by presenting a new type of ethical engagement with technology: *technological ambiguity*. To do this, this chapter will first (I) present a framework for understanding *technological ambiguity*. Second, (II) this chapter will synthesize Niebuhr's understanding of anxiety and sin with Mumford and Marcuse's critiques of the technological society. Finally, (III) this chapter will offer a Christian response to anxiety and sin within the technological society.

I: A Framework for Understanding Technological Ambiguity

This section will begin to bring together Niebuhr, Mumford, and Marcuse to give a fuller picture of the technological society through a new way of understanding technology. First, (A) this section will show why it is necessary to break from the neutrality/non-neutrality binary, and show why it is beneficial to examine a new approach: *technological ambiguity*. Second, (B) this section will use Niebuhr's treatment of history-as-ambiguous as a framework for understanding the ambiguity of technology, and provide a way in which both Mumford and Marcuse can be housed together.

A. Why Technological Ambiguity Matters

It is not enough to say technology is neutral or non-neutral, as both presumptions obscure an anthropology high enough and low enough to maintain ethical responsibility—the uneasy conscience. Presuming that technology is neutral obscures the depths of human nature, by assuming that the evils of the technological society can be eradicated by realizing and establishing society's highest values. Presuming technology is non-neutral obscures the heights of human nature, by assuming the effects of the technological society are so ubiquitous that the human is incapable of operating ethically within it. Both ends of the binary presume and perpetuate an easy conscience that mitigates ethical responsibility by externalizing the sources of both good and evil. What is needed is a fresh approach to technology that corresponds with an uneasy conscience; one that is not naïve to the myriad effects of technology, yet does not presume so weak a position so as to remain helpless. What is needed is the confession of *Technological Ambiguity.*

To call technology ambiguous is to affirm that technology is to some degree under human control, and to some degree not entirely under human control; that technology impacts humanity significantly, but not entirely, but that extent remains ambiguous. Despite their helpful critiques regarding the technological society, Mumford and Marcuse ultimately failed because they assumed more about technology than what they could realistically know. Both thinkers, emboldened by their overly simplified anthropologies, simplified too their presumptions about technology—and the two are related. It is no coincidence that Mumford, who views technology as neutral, also views the human as maintaining an all-powerful consciousness that can be utilized in one's control over that technology; likewise, it is no coincidence that Marcuse, who views technology as non-neutral, also views the human as a slave to history and rationality. To

speak of technology is to speak of anthropology, and for both thinkers, the two subjects are simplified and synchronized to the point that the human is either too transcendent to be ethically burdened, or too contingent to be ethically complicit. Neutrality and non-neutrality are simply two different avenues for arriving at the same easy conscience.

However, to view technology as ambiguous is to grant proper dimension to anthropology, so that one may maintain a realism that can remain suspicious of its power without assuming it is beyond human control. Confessing that the extent of technology's impact on society is unknown properly places the human in a position of relative autonomy—an arena where ethical responsibility is possible, and the uneasy conscience can maintain the necessary intersection of power and limitation to remain responsible.

B. Creator and Creature: Niebuhr's View of History as a Way of Understanding Technological Ambiguity

If it is the case that to speak of technology is to speak of anthropology—if neutrality presumes too high a view of anthropology, and non-neutrality presumes too low a view of anthropology—then it is necessary to argue that *Technological Ambiguity* must correspond to an equally ambiguous anthropology: the Christian doctrine of the Imago Dei. To show how these correspond, this section will utilize Niebuhr's treatment of history-as-ambiguous as an allegory for understanding *Technological Ambiguity* from the position of the Imago Dei.

"It is obvious," Niebuhr states, "that the self's freedom over natural process enables it to be a creator of historical events."[885] Here Niebuhr asserts that, on the one hand, the human being transcends history in one's freedom, and therefore has the ability, with that freedom, to some degree manage history towards society's benefit or detriment. However, on the other hand,

[885] SDH, P. 41.

"…the self is not simply a creator of this new dimension, for it is also a creature of the web of events, in the creation of which it participates."[886] The human is simultaneously the subjective guide and the guided object of history.

This paradox Niebuhr detects at the center of the human's perception of history is directly related to the ambiguity of the human situation, evidenced in the "vexation" that exists at the center of self-awareness: the human is both spirit and animal, both transcends nature and is very much a product of it; the human is "homeless."[887] However, the human devises "premature solutions" that articulate the human being either from the position of a spiritual, rational, and transcendent creator, or a bound creature, subject to nature's impulses, vicissitudes, and drives. These same "premature solutions" are at work implicitly in how one perceives history. The human situation as homeless is prematurely resolved and flattened out to resemble one aspect of one's nature at the expense of the other—either as a subject which is an all free, all powerful guide to history—thus negating one's affinity with nature—or a pathetic object which is guided by history—thus negating one's capacity to direct it.

Niebuhr then carries this paradox into his formulation of a proximal solution by assuming the Christian language derived from his conception of the Imago Dei: the human is *both* creator *and* creature. Niebuhr asserts that the human is "…a unity of God-likeness and creatureliness in which he remains a creature even in the highest spiritual dimensions of his existence and may reveal elements of the image of God even in the lowliest aspects of his natural life."[888] It is by this faith principle that Niebuhr makes sense of the reality of the human situation; the human is *ambiguous*, both creator and creature—the human is both rationally and spiritually *transcendent*,

[886] Ibid.
[887] Ibid., P. 14.
[888] Ibid., P. 150.

and naturally and historically *contingent*. It is the affirmation of the *ambiguity* of self—that the human is both powerful, yet limited; free, yet bound—that clarifies the human's relationship with history. The human does not completely transcend history to guide it, nor is the human entirely contingent upon history to be guided by it. Thus, according to Niebuhr, "History is a realm of ambiguity."[889]

Regarding technology, the binary of neutrality and non-neutrality is presented in a similar fashion as Niebuhr describes history. To modify Niebuhr's words on history towards those of technology, "It is obvious that the self's freedom over natural process enables it to be a creator" of technology.[890] The human being transcends nature in one's freedom, and therefore has the ability, with that freedom, to some degree manage technology towards society's benefit or detriment. However, "…the self is not simply a creator of this new dimension [of technology], for it is also a creature…in the creation of which it participates."[891] The human is simultaneously the subjective guide and the guided object of technology.

Similar to the paradox Niebuhr finds at the center of history, the paradox at the center of technology is also directly related to the ambiguity of the human situation. The human is both spirit and animal, both transcends nature and is very much a product of it; the human is "homeless."[892] However, the human devises "premature solutions" that articulate the human being either from the position of a spiritual, rational, and transcendent creator *over* technology (neutrality/Mumford), or a bound creature, subject to nature's impulses, vicissitudes, and history (non-neutrality/Marcuse). These same "premature solutions" are at work implicitly in how one perceives technology. The human situation as homeless is prematurely resolved and flattened

[889] FAH, P. 16.
[890] SDH, P. 41. Modification from history to technology mine.
[891] Ibid.
[892] Ibid., P. 14.

out to resemble one aspect of one's nature at the expense of the other—either as Marcuse's transcendent and heroic human who is tasked with overpowering technology via his organic rationalism, or as Marcuse's pathetic human who is a slave to technology, absent the intervention of some spiritualized Hegelian mediation.

It is, therefore, vital to carry the paradox of creature and creator into one's estimation of technology by asserting Niebuhr's language derived from the Christian concept of the Imago Dei: the human is both creator *and* creature. It is this faith principle that clarifies the reality of the human situation in the technological society; the human is *ambiguous*, both rationally and spiritually *transcendent*, *and* naturally and technologically *contingent*. Affirming the *ambiguity* of self—that the human is both powerful, yet limited; free, yet bound—clarifies the human's relationship with technology. The human is not completely transcendent above technology to guide it, nor is the human entirely contingent upon technology to be guided by it. Much like history, technology is also a "realm of ambiguity,"[893] as one cannot make any definitive or universal statements about it without obscuring also the immutably paradoxical predicament of the human situation.[894]

II: Technological Anxiety and Sin

A. Technological Anxiety

To this point, such a case has been made from the basis of a Niebuhrian resolution between two opposing perceptions, and done so from the ground of Christian anthropology. However, there is a very clear impact—indeed *the* impact—that technology as an ambiguous

[893] FAH, P. 16.
[894] In her essay, "The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Moral Ambiguity' to Contemporary Discussions on the Morality of Intervention and the Use of Force in a Post-Cold War World" (in *Political Theology* Vol. 5 Is., 2004. P. 179), María Teresa Dávila notes that Niebuhr views all human activity as *ambiguous*, but that it "…is ultimately linked to his anthropology and his understanding of original sin and redemptions in Jesus Christ."

phenomenon has upon society: technology more fully reveals the human situation, and by extension, more fully complicates human anxiety.

In a brief, yet prescient essay regarding the new environment created by the proliferation of nuclear weaponry and the question of whether the United States should develop the hydrogen bomb, Niebuhr astutely argues that the newly created environment of the Cold War does less to create new problems, but it rather inflates and compounds the original vexations of the human condition. "Each age of mankind," Niebuhr argues, "brings forth new perils and new possibilities. Yet they are always related to what we have known before…. Our present situation is a heightened and more vivid explication of the human situation."[895] Effectively, Niebuhr argues that the nuclear age—a new horizon of the human's conquest over nature—has created an environment that exacerbates the fundamental vexation of the individual. In fact, the more one attempts to bring such an environment "under moral control," Niebuhr argues, "…the whole ambiguity of the human situation is more fully revealed."[896]

Likewise, the technological society in its entirety more fully reveals and compounds the vexations at the center of the human situation by expanding human reach, further obscuring human limitation, and confusing the human's ability to realistically assess either in relation to the other. The technological society is a new environment much like the nuclear age was for Niebuhr: "…a heightened and more vivid explication of the human situation."[897] Ultimately, the greater the reach of technology, the more the human involves him or herself in the collision of one's perceived capacities and limitations—one's transcendence and contingence—and the more one's anxiety is revealed and compounded.

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[895] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Hydrogen Bomb," in *The Reinhold Niebuhr Reader*, Charles Brown (ed.), (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992), P. 75.
[896] Ibid., P. 76.
[897] Ibid., P. 75.

B. Technological Sin

As the ambiguity of technology reveals more clearly the vexations at the center of the human situation, it also points more directly towards the myth of the Garden of Eden as a clarifying resource for anthropology, as well as a guiding resource for human conduct; much more than Mumford's story of mechanistic psychosis or Marcuse's modified Hegelian dialectic. While the consequences of technological sin are much more ambiguous and perilous, the problem remains essentially the same: the human is "…tempted by the situation in which he stands."[898]

As described more fully in Chapter 3, Adam and Eve as Imago Dei are both creator and creature—both transcendent spirit and contingent animal—yet they are both sinners. They sin not as necessity, but as an inevitable result of the "dizziness of freedom.,"[899] or anxiety. The collision of their transcendent faculties with the awareness of their contingency tempts them towards illusions about the self which obscure the full dimension of the Imago Dei. Armed with these obscurities about self, they sin by acting upon their illusions in one of two ways: pride or sensuality.

Regarding *technological ambiguity*, the anxiety at its center provides the same occasion for the sins of pride and sensuality. While Niebuhr himself never articulates a full critique of the technological society, his Christian anthropology, in concert with the new approach of *technological ambiguity* proposed in this thesis, provides a platform upon which one can synthesize both Mumford and Marcuse's critiques of the technological society to fit within the context of Christian sin. This section will explore the ways Mumford and Marcuse's critiques can be incorporated into Niebuhr's conceptions of pride and sensuality, respectively.

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[898] NDHN, P. 17.
[899] Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, P. 61.

1. Technological Sin as Pride: Mumford's Myth of the Machine

According to Niebuhr, "Man falls into pride when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance…."[900] The human ignores one's limitations, contingencies, and finitude and operates under the illusion that something of a divine status is achievable by the human's transcendent faculties alone. Adam and Eve were tempted by the recognition of their low stature, and attempted to raise that contingency to the heights of their divine aspirations. They decided to ignore their unique and seemingly conflicted position in the cosmos as the Imago Dei, in order to achieve the higher position of God.

While Mumford's assessment of the technological society lacks in some areas because he obscures the human in a way that grants him or her infinite capacities of transcendence through consciousness, his construction of the technological society as a myth which finds its origin in ancient Egypt is particularly helpful when assessing technological pride. Mumford exposes the ways in which humans move beyond their contingency, but lacks a proper countering myth to give the human enough dimension to be responsible in the technological society.

Mumford is correct to argue that the technological society, or what he calls "the Megamachine," is developed and propelled forward by a certain mythology that is created and reinforced by society. To make this point, Mumford cogently draws similarities from the myth that is at work in ancient Egypt to today, where a religiously devout constituency of workers marry together in their minds the exploits of labor with spiritual servitude, and hold together that marriage by an unquestioning subservience to a divine king—Pharaoh—who represented for them a Prime Mover, a "…fusion of sacred and temporal power."[901]

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[900] Ibid., P. 186.
[901] MOM, P. 170.

However, the way Mumford connects this myth to today's technological society complicates the way in which the myth can be articulated and critiqued within an ethical framework. He is right to affirm that humans today spiritualize their work and the fruits of their work, but it is not—as he asserts—for the lone benefit of the Megamachine, but rather for the benefit of the self. In other words, it is not the Megamachine that takes the place of Pharaoh, it is every individual. The individual in the technological society is now the Prime Mover.

While this shift does little to negate the cogency of Mumford's broader critique, it does re-locate the problem of the technological society from a dubious form of abstract thinking to a problem of human pride. While Mumford essentially argues that it is the abstraction of time, space, and value that leads towards the Megamachine becoming the new Pharaoh, his articulation of the Megatechnic Bribe—though far less pronounced in his work—is a much better conceptualization of the problem at the center of the technological society. The human is drawn to the Megamachine, not because one grows accustomed to some psychopathic way of thinking, but rather to, in the words of Niebuhr, "…transcend their mortal and insecure existence and to establish a security to which man has no right."[902] The human is convinced of the myth's power because he or she is convinced of their own power and transcendence. The evils of the technological society are not due to some transcendent abstractions, but rather the illusion of human transcendence and self-sufficiency.

With that said, the abstractions of time, space, and value at work in creating and sustaining the technological society indeed amplify the illusion of self-transcendence. The conceptual enslavement of nature creates a false estimation of self,[903] by confusing the human's

[902] NDHN, P. 138.
[903] In his essay, "God's Design and the Present Disorder of Civilization" (in *Faith and Politics*, Ronald H. Stone, ed., New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc., 1968. P. 110), Niebuhr argues, "…the great achievement of modern

capacity to predict and control nature with the human's stature in the cosmos. Mumford's critique of mechanistic thinking—of abstracting nature in order to better transcend it—informs to an even greater degree Niebuhr's critique of the pride of modern society: "The mastery of nature is vainly believed to be an adequate substitute for self-mastery."[904]

Furthermore, the myth of the machine at the center of the technological society tempts each adherent as it would the Prime Mover of Egypt. Equipped with the power and reach of the technological society, each individual is endowed with illusions of their own transcendence, further leading to the myth of their own self-sufficiency. On Egypt, Niebuhr states, "Thus Egypt exists by the beneficences of nature in terms of the Nile's rhythmic seasons, but…she imagines herself the author of the source of her wealth."[905] Humans confuse their transcendence over nature for a divine, all-transcendence over nature. Like ancient Egypt, today's myth of the machine weds together the spiritualization of the human's labor and the fruits of that labor, however, unlike ancient Egypt, today's myth binds both of these in the illusion that the worker-as-consumer is, by their own estimation, the origin and ultimate transcendent mover of that fusion.

It is important to observe that this pride is partly the result of the typical anxiety associated with the human's relationship to nature, but it is expounded and further frustrated by the anxiety related to *Technological Ambiguity*. Neither nature nor humanity's instruments derived from nature are entirely controllable by the human, and neither are as easily assimilated and employed towards the achievement of their ambitions as what they seem. This is partly because human ambition knows no limits, but partly because human contingency to nature is too

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culture, the understanding of nature, is also the cause of the great confusion of modern man: the misunderstanding of human nature."

[904] Niebuhr, "Our Secularized Society."

[905] NDHN, P. 138-139.

unavoidable. Humans will always dream for results that are far beyond what they can realistically achieve; therein lies their sin.[906]

Regarding the relationship between pride and anxiety, Niebuhr warns, "To the end of history social orders will probably destroy themselves in the effort to prove that they are indestructible."[907] There is a firm link between human pride and one's anxiety regarding natural contingency and *technological ambiguity*; not unlike the consequences of the first sin of pride revealing the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Every step towards transcendence reveals a new limitation or contingency, thus laying the foundation for the next sin of pride. Niebuhr states, "Thus man seeks to make himself God because he is betrayed by both his greatness and his weakness; and there is no level of greatness and power in which the lash of fear is not at least one strand in the whip of ambition."[908] It is in this way that the technological society presents itself as an endless march towards domination, where the self is positioned in an endless quest to master that one stubborn part of nature that one fears is still not mastered.

2. Technological Sin as Sensuality: Marcuse's Happy Consciousness

While the highlight of the story of the Garden of Eden has overwhelmingly been, according to both Niebuhr and Augustine, Adam and Eve's first sin of pride, the story as a whole is instructive regarding both forms of human sin—pride *and* sensuality.[909] As discussed in Chapter 3, they are prideful because they ignore their contingent nature to achieve the transcendence of the Creator; they in effect raise their "contingent existence to unconditioned

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[906] NDHN, P. 194.
[907] BTR, P. 224.
[908] NDHN, P. 194.
[909] Niebuhr argues, "Without question Biblical religion defines sin as primarily pride and self-love" (NDHN, P. 228), and that it is "consistently maintained in the strain of theology generally known as Augustinian" (P. 186). Indeed, Augustine affirms this position in his *City of God* (Gerald G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan, Daniel J. Honan (trs.), New York, NY: Doubleday, 1958. Ch. 13): "Now could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will?"

significance."[910] However, they also sin by way of sensuality in that both seek "…to escape from [their] unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination…by losing [themselves] in some natural vitality." Essentially, both externalize responsibility by blaming sin on another (Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent), as if *neither had control over their own actions*. It is as if in one moment, Adam and Eve thought themselves powerful enough to become gods, and in the next moment they considered themselves so weak that they could not be held responsible—as if they were mere animals. This oscillation from pride to sensuality is also a feature of the technological society.

While the externalization of responsibility—blaming others for the how they use their freedom—is a key outcome of sensuality, it arises by "losing [oneself] in some natural vitality." Essentially, Adam and Eve confused the temptation itself for an unshakable coercion over their freedom; they "lost" themselves. They believed that they effectively had no choice but to sin, and therefore, it was each sinner's respective tempter who was to blame. This movement of reasoning is partly due to their perceived weakness in retrospect, but it is partly due to the illusion that that which tempts them is also all-powerful, at least so far as their freedom is concerned. They were fooled into interpreting their sin as a necessity. This is in many ways the opposite of pride; Molhoek differentiates the two in this way: "Whereas pride is an attempt to control what is beyond control, sensuality is being caught up in the things that can be controlled."[911] Ultimately, sensuality is submitting one's freedom at the feet of temptation, and giving up one's power and transcendence for the sake of that which is not God.

While Marcuse's assessment of the technological society lacks in some areas because he obscures the human in a way that diminishes one's capacities of transcendence under the weight

[910] Ibid.
[911] Molhoek, "Revitalizing the Originals," P. 4.

of technological rationality, reification, and history, his construction of Happy Consciousness is particularly helpful when assessing the technological sin of sensuality. Essentially, the economic and technological structures today perpetuate and expand the illusion that humans are helpless and incapable of critiquing and correcting both the self and society.

Through his analysis of Repressive Desublimation and technological rationality, Marcuse rightly argues that the technological society has created for humans an environment that, by some measure, weakens critical insight by reducing human concerns and expression to economic exchange. From art to sexual relationships, everything is commodified into a one-dimensional exchange of that which one wants for that which another has. Technological rationality has tamed art and critical thinking by transforming "…their subversive force, their destructive content—their truth" into "familiar goods and services."[912] Ultimately, for Marcuse, Happy Consciousness is the condition where the human can no longer experience guilt or imagine any alternative to the society he or she inhabits because they are inundated with a false sense of contentment in the luxuries the technological society provides.

While Marcuse is right that the technological society as a structure creates an environment that inhibits critical thought, it is not entirely for the reasons he gives. The evils of the technological society—in this case, the diminishment of critical faculties—are not exclusively due to market forces, history, or the bourgeoise, but rather the sin of sensuality: the illusion that human beings are contingent and dependent upon the comforts and luxuries the technological society provides. This is not to suggest that the technological society's structure is not a part of this sin, as this would be akin to saying the serpent was not a part of Adam and Eve's sin. Rather, the technological society is unique in that it indeed creates such an abundance

[912] ODM, P. 61.

of goods in which the human's most base impulses find desirable that all transcendent thought—the basis for human criticism—is diminished *for the sake* of modern conveniences.[913] It is in this way Marcuse is right: the human reifies the self by diminishing one's transcendent features to the forces of supply and demand.[914] The human is in a perpetual state of diminishing its higher—both moral and rational—inclinations in favor of a flattened-out, naturalistic drive for survival and pleasure.

Furthermore, what compounds the problem of sensuality in the technological society is an intersection where the Happy Consciousness it creates becomes reciprocated in the predominantly held naturalism of contemporary culture.[915] The tendency to reduce happiness to the fulfilment of animal impulse and desire both perpetuates the technological society, and is rewarded by the technological society. On the one hand, the technological society is perpetuated in that a growth in ubiquity is always in demand, as there is no end to human desire; on the other hand, the perception of naturalism is rewarded by the technological society in that it is always developing new comforts that feed the creature's natural appetites. It is in this way that naturalism and the technological society conform to one another, creating an illusion of one-dimensionality. Not coincidentally, the more the human understands him or herself as contingent to or enslaved by nature, the more the human accepts the illusion of their contingency and enslavement to the technological society.

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[913] Molhoek argues that the temptation of sensuality is uniquely proliferated in the technological society: "Indulging every pleasure to its fullest is a sign of power and an expression of idolatry, *something that one is freed to do because they have the resources and ability to do so*." ("Sensuality and Altering Anthropology in Artificial Intelligence and Transhumanism," P. 103. Emphasis added.)

[914]) Molhoek briefly argues the connection between sensuality and Critical Theory's conception of reification: "An inherent aspect of sensuality is the reification of the self." (Ibid.)

[915] For cogent arguments regarding modern society's worldview defaulting to naturalism, see: Robbins, "It's always right now;" Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

Furthermore, and most crucial to the sin of sensuality, Happy Consciousness also expands and compounds naturalism's ultimate anthropological and ethical expression: the easy conscience. Like Adam and Eve blaming one another for their sin, the technological society's illusion of human contingency diminishes ethical responsibility by diminishing human transcendence; this means not only that humans grow less critical of society, but also that he or she grows less self-critical, and further affirms the externalization of both good and evil.

Much like Adam and Eve conflating temptation with coercion, the tendency for those in the technological society—including its critic, Marcuse—is to escape one's positioning as a transcendent, responsible being by interpreting its comforts as a necessary coercion of freedom, rather than a condition which provides the occasion for temptation. The evil of the technological society is not necessary to the condition of human beings—it is not a sin to benefit from technology—it is a sin to use those comforts as a pretext to deny one's transcendence, freedom, and responsibility. This is the essence of the easy conscience, where one is moved to interpret evil and goodness—not as the product of one's free will, as one is flattened to conform to "purely mechanical proportions"[916]—but as external realities, if anything at all. The self ultimately becomes mastered by nature and technology.

II: Sources of Salvation

A. Salvation from Technological Ambiguity as Anxiety

The Christian response to anxiety, according to Niebuhr, is two-fold. First, humans are not the source of their own salvation, as "…every individual is a Moses who perishes outside the promised land,"[917] and one must gain some measure of serenity in accepting that evil is not

[916] Ibid., P. 70.
[917] NDHD, P. 308.

something humans have the capacity to completely resolve. This is particularly instructive in the technological society, as every new technological avenue opened provides the occasion for new expressions of sin.

Second, the recognition that one is incapable of resolving one's sinful condition is bound up and housed in the belief of the promise of the coming Messiah. This belief presents the resolution of evil in two important ways; one is obvious, the other is less obvious. The obvious implication, according to Niebuhr, is that the Messiah "will fulfill and not annul the richness and variety which the temporal process has elaborated."[918] In other words, the coming Christ gives life meaning because His return is a continuation and fulfillment of the goodness already at work. The less obvious implication is that "the condition of finiteness and freedom, which lies at the basis of historical existence, is a problem for which there is no solution by any human power. Only God can solve this problem."[919] Hope in the coming Messiah grants serenity for accepting the evils of the technological society, and restrains the urge to recapitulate its evils in the very attempt to correct them. Finding serenity in the coming Messiah not only ensures humanity that goodness matters, but it is also a guard against the vain belief that humans can save themselves. It is in this way that humans are hopeful without falling into the naïve trap of idealism, self-sufficiency, and unfettered optimism, and can yet achieve serenity and humility without falling into bitter cynicism, resignation, and pessimism.

As humanity progresses further into the technological age, and as humanity tethers itself ever closer to technology's ambiguity, it is important to recognize the very real implications of an increasingly ambiguous future. Just as those individuals who created the combustible engine had not the faintest idea of how what they made would contribute to climate change, humans

[918] Ibid., P. 295.
[919] Ibid.

must proceed with technology with the understanding that its effects are never completely understood in any context of history.[920] Equipped with the ever-increasing power of technology, humans may very well destroy themselves, as humans are constantly developing new ways to do it;[921] and yet technology could also exponentially lengthen the human lifespan, or end world hunger. The abuses that accompany the dissemination of information could very well lead to the dismantling of democratic institutions across the West, but it could also expose corruption and increase transparency. Regardless of where technology takes humanity—or perhaps, too, where humanity takes technology—humanity must generate a sober view of its limitations and capacities, and the greatest source for that sobriety is having a serenity about the things that cannot be controlled. Technology itself must be recognized as something humanity cannot entirely wield, and so humanity's dependence upon a coming Messiah becomes that much more important, as it continually instructs its users and participants that both salvation *from* technology and salvation *as a result* of technology is not entirely in the hands of its creator, but rather in the hands of the human's Creator.

B. Salvation from Technological Pride

The Christian response to pride is faith. Faith "…makes it possible for man to relate himself to God without pretending to be God; and to accept his distance from God as a created thing, without believing that the evil of his nature is caused by this finiteness."[922] Faith is similar

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[920] Niebuhr argues that, if anything, technics have made the future more precarious. See: Niebuhr, "Modern Civilization," in *NBC's Town Meeting on the Air* (1939). Additionally, in his essay, "The Vulnerable World Hypothesis" (forthcoming in *Global Policy*), Nick Bostrom argues persuasively that such a great number of new innovations threaten humankind that a new approach, what he calls "the vulnerable world hypothesis," is necessary in order to "evaluate the risk-benefit balance of developments toward ubiquitous surveillance or a unipolar world order." Bostrom argues that the primary objective for humankind currently is to appropriately conceptualize advancement under the perennial threat of global catastrophe.

[921] Niebuhr: "Yet civilizations do die; and it may be that, like the individual, they destroy themselves when they try too desperately to live or when the seek their own life too consistently." (FAH, P. 216)

[922] NDHN, P. 15.

to the serenity found in the Messianic hope in that both provide the outcome of humility, but it is different in two important ways. First, faith has an epistemic quality to it that guards against the temptation to prematurely resolve the paradoxes of human nature. It effectively allows the human to house both human contingency and transcendence together without negating one to fully activate the other. But second, faith is the human's explicit guard against becoming God.[923] Faith is the confession that one can relate to God, but must not confuse him or herself *with* God.

Faith in God is the realistic confession that no human is a master of nature or technology. It is a confession of both the ambiguity of technology, and the very real limitations of humanity, regardless of how the power and illusions of technology may tempt its user. Faith is the ultimate confession that humans are never entirely in control of nature or the instruments they create, and the guard against confusing oneself with God, while still maintaining communion with God.

C. Salvation from Technological Sensuality

The Christian response to sensuality is two-fold. First, Christianity affirms the transcendence of humans, yet the reality of their dependence upon God. Moses and Christ's statement that "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" is a profound affirmation that the human being is not ruled even by that which he or she needs.[924] Humans transcend nature, and are not bound to desire, greed, comfort, or luxury. However, the statement of human transcendence—"one does not live by bread alone"—is quickly qualified by a statement of dependence: "…but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." While Moses and Christ are clear in their affirmation of human

[923] Concomitant to faith, for an excellent study on how Sabbath is in part a response to the pride of Pharaoh and idolatry of Egypt, see: Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).
[924] Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4 (Christ supplants "Lord" with "God"), *NRSV*.

transcendence over nature, they are also quick to affirm the rightful position of that transcendence: in submission to God's word. This construct of transcendent-yet-dependent is the ultimate guard, not only against sensuality, but also against the swing from sensuality to pride, as the human is never so controlled so as to be a slave to nature, yet never so transcendent to be its master.

The second Christian response to sensuality is in some ways a furtherance of the first, yet is bound up in one single command:[925] "[Y]ou shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."[926] This very clear dictate is not only an indictment on those who do not serve God, but conversely on those who serve *another* God. One is to devote oneself to the God that is beyond, who is unseen, whose purposes transcend the desires of this world. The two parts of this command are bound up in one another, as faith in one necessarily means the diminishment of the other.

Both of these Christian responses to sensuality—transcendence-yet-dependence and the worship God over idols—not only provide a guard against sensuality, but also reveal a clearer picture of the way humans sin in the technological society. It is the illusion of human contingency and the idolatry of that which is created that leads to an easy conscience which diminishes human freedom when its fruit of responsibility is most in need. In a statement on idolatry—though clearly finds resonance with technological idolatry—Augustine states, "For what could be more hapless than a man controlled by his own creations? It is surely easier for

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[925] While there is precedent to unify Exodus 20:3 and 20:4—not least Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* (United States: Hymn Book Publishing Committee of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1893, P. 5)—it is understood that traditionally the two are separated into distinct commandments. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is most helpful to treat the two as one, as the both demonstrate the need to honor God before all others and abstain from idolatry.
[926] Exodus 20:3-4, *NRSV*.

man to cease to be a man by worshiping man-made gods than for idols to become divine by being adored."[927] Here Augustine laments on how pathetic it is for a human to worship that which is created, implying that the human transcends that which is earthly—the human does not simply live by bread alone. But perhaps his further point is more instructive to the technological society: the worship of that which is created—including technology—diminishes human beings to the point they "cease" to be humans. What humans risk in the sensuality made possible by the technological society is diminishment of what makes humans unique; it lowers the human to its most base impulses and rids the self of any determination of ethical responsibility. The human escapes being human.[928]

D. Conclusion: The Uneasy Conscience in the Technological Society

The Christian conception of self—as expressed in creation as Imago Dei, and in the Garden as sinner—is the most optimal anthropology for assessing the technological society, as one is both mindful of one's relationship to technology (creature and creator), and the way one becomes destructive when one facet of that relationship is diminished (pride and sensuality). "Christianity, therefore," Niebuhr states, "issues inevitably in the religious expression of an uneasy conscience. *Only within terms of the Christian faith* can man not only understand the reality of evil in himself but escape the error of attributing that evil to any one but himself."[929] The oscillation of the technological society from humans, the master of technology, to humans, the slave of technology—from prideful exploiter of nature, to pathetic worshipper of nature—

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[927] Augustine, *City of God*, Ch. 23.
[928] In his essay, "*The Niebuhrian Legacy and the Idea of Responsibility*" (in *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vol. 22 No. 4, October 2009. P. 413), Douglas Ottati notes the poignancy of Niebuhr's analysis of sensuality in contemporary society, and especially its tendency towards escapism: "We attempt to insulate ourselves and perhaps grow numb. Now the problem is not inordinate self-assertion but rather deficient participation in our many relationships and responsibilities."
[929] NDHN, P. 17.

must resolve itself in an uneasy anthropology that can house its necessary tensions of transcendence and contingence in a way that grants enough dimension to the self to ensure the expression of an uneasy conscience: the basis of ethical responsibility. Without the faith principle of the Imago Dei and its corresponding confession of *technological ambiguity*, humans buy into the illusion that they are either too transcendent to be ethically burdened, or too contingent to be ethically complicit.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

I: Summary

There is a pressing need in contemporary scholarship to understand the anthropological dimensions of any presupposition regarding the relationship between human beings and technology. The binary between technological neutrality and non-neutrality—whether it is the case that humans control their instruments absolutely or whether technology is shaping human conduct and society—is too often shaped by premature solutions regarding the paradox of human transcendence and natural contingence. One is tempted either to presume that humans transcend technology to the point that further ethical consideration is unnecessary (Hard Instrumental Theory), or that humans are so contingent and dependent upon technology that the human is no longer free enough to think and act independently (Substantive Theory). Either way, ethical responsibility is diminished, as technology is either non-threatening enough to disregard, or so threatening the human is enslaved.

However, two forms of critical analysis appear to be cognizant of the pitfalls of both extremes: Soft Instrumental Theory and Critical Theory. The former, represented in this thesis by Lewis Mumford, is able to presume that technology is neutral and that humans transcend technology. However, unlike others who view technology as neutral, he is still able to criticize the technological society. The latter, represented by Herbert Marcuse, is able to presume that technology is non-neutral and that humans are effectively transformed and even enslaved by technology, yet he is still able to denounce the deterministic essence of technology that is shared by others who make the same non-neutral presumption.

Despite each thinker's critical contribution, however, neither is able to generate realistic ways to respond to what they critiqued, as neither begin with a realistic anthropology that can

properly establish ethical responsibility. It is for this reason that this thesis utilizes Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian anthropology as a basis for articulating and maintaining ethical responsibility, and to furthermore provide a framework for properly establishing the technological critiques of Mumford and Marcuse within a new type of technological engagement: *technological ambiguity*.

The second chapter articulates Niebuhr's tripartite methodological construction of theological anthropology, prophetic apologetics, and ethical realism, and demonstrates the continuity of this project with such a methodology. Additionally, in proposing such a unique methodology, it was necessary to establish and defend the theological validity of this method from its most ardent critics: namely, Karl Barth and Stanley Hauerwas. This chapter concluded with the methodological vision of this thesis: (1) as part of the theological anthropology method, this thesis would establish Niebuhr's Christian anthropology as a basis for understanding ethical responsibility in the form of two Niebuhrian categories: the easy conscience and the uneasy conscience; (2) as part of the prophetic apologetic method, this thesis would critique Mumford and Marcuse by showing that both thinker's presumed anthropology is expressed as an easy conscience, and that expression leads to the diminishment of ethical responsibility and in turn provides unrealistic and faulty responses to the technological society; (3) as part of the ethical realism method, this thesis would synthesize key observations of Mumford and Marcuse with Niebuhr's view of sin and the uneasy conscience in order to contribute a fresh and realistic way to approach ethics in the technological society.

The third chapter begins the methodological approach described in the second chapter by establishing Niebuhr's Christian anthropology as the foundation upon which ethical responsibility is possible. This chapter affirms Niebuhr's preliminary observation that the

human being is a problem unto him or herself, and that any premature solution to such a problem eliminates ethical responsibility by embracing illusions of utter transcendence and freedom, or utter contingency and finitude. Contrary to these premature solutions, this chapter offers Niebuhr's paradoxical faith principle regarding anthropology, that the human being is both creator and creature (Imago Dei), and that the human sins by disregarding or diminishing either in favor of the other (Pride and Sensuality). This chapter concludes that only the anthropological presumption of one as Imago Dei—and its corresponding doctrine of Original Sin—can offer the human the dimension necessary to express oneself in the form of an uneasy conscience—the ability to articulate both evil and good as a product of human freedom, and the anthropological foundation of ethical responsibility.

The fourth chapter begins the second part of the tripartite methodological approach introduced in Chapter 2, one that would extend through the seventh chapter: namely, prophetic apologetics. In keeping with this method, the fourth chapter uses Niebuhr's Christian anthropology to critique Mumford's anthropology on the basis that it expresses itself as an easy conscience, incapable of attributing evil to the self. Mumford's articulation of organicism imagines that the human is by nature a certain internal and external balance, and that balance can be willed upon the self by a powerful, transcending consciousness. Evil is nothing more than a rational defect that interrupts that balance in the form of psychosis.

The fifth chapter continues the prophetic apologetic approach regarding Mumford by examining his critique of the technological society and his prescribed ethical response to such a critique. While certain elements of that critique were found to be helpful, his responses to the problems he discovered were found too unrealistic, overwhelmingly due to the easy conscience resulting from his too simplistic anthropology. Because Mumford understands evil as a rational

defect, one must either escape that place where mechanistic rationality is most disseminated or devise utopian myths that can correct the ills of society simply by believing in the more favorable view of organicism. Both avenues are unrealistic, as human consciousness is presumed to be either too powerful to overcome (if the consciousness is creating the Megamachine), or powerful enough to correct its own ills. Additionally, Mumford's anthropology as expressed as an easy conscience also compounds the problem of anxiety as he is compelled to articulate an increasingly evil world while still maintaining a high estimation of self.

The sixth chapter continues the prophetic apologetic methodology, but instead now focuses on Marcuse. Similar to Chapter 4, the sixth chapter uses Niebuhr's Christian anthropology to critique Marcuse's Marxist-Hegelian anthropology to show that it expresses itself as an easy conscience, incapable of attributing evil to the self. Marcuse's articulation of the self as a sociologically, materialistically, and historically-bound creature is too flat to be responsible for evil or goodness. Even in his modified and spiritualized Hegelianism, at its best, Marcuse's human is still a pathetic creature who is determined by the collectively held consciousness of one's community. Evil, to Marcuse, is nothing more than an historical, rational, or economic defect, imposed upon the creature from external sources.

The seventh chapter concluded the prophetic apologetic methodology by examining Marcuse's critique of the technological society and his prescribed ethical response to such a critique. While Marcuse offers an insightful critique of the technological society, his responses to that critique were too unrealistic due to the easy conscience expressed by his anthropology. Because Marcuse articulates evil as an external entity to which the human is enslaved, all forms of salvation are never fully about the correction of any single individual, but rather the collective,

in unison, discovering the negative thinking mediated to them from the work of Heidegger, Feuerbach, or Freud, that is necessary for economic and political revolution. At best, his low anthropology forces Marcuse to develop an overly mystified Hegelianism, and at worst an unending search to discover revolutionary subjects to drag his pathetic conception of the human into action. Additionally, Marcuse's anthropology as expressed as an easy conscience also compounds the problem of anxiety, as the pathetic creature he assumes to be human is always absorbed into an evil reality that his deified Hegelian dialectic can never resolve.

The eighth chapter represents the final part of the tripartite methodological approach: ethical realism. This chapter begins by showing that not only is a proper response to the technological society diminished by one's prematurely resolved anthropology, but for both Mumford and Marcuse this is still reflected in their insistence upon presuming an answer to the binary of technological neutrality versus non-neutrality. Instead, this chapter proposed a new type regarding ethical engagement with technology: *technological ambiguity*. This chapter argues that *technological ambiguity* not only provides space for both Mumford and Marcuse's critiques, but also that it rightly acknowledges the anxiety inherent to the binary itself: humans cannot fully understand to what extent they are in control of technology and to what extent they are being influenced and shaped by technology.

The eighth chapter then establishes Niebuhr's anthropology alongside *technological ambiguity*, arguing that the technological society (1) is cradled by an ideological spirit and structure that obscures the self by articulating humanity as either the master of nature or one who is mastered by nature, (2) reveals a "a heightened and more vivid explication of the human situation"[930] by intensifying anxiety through an increase in power and freedom, yet an increased

[930] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Reinhold Niebuhr Reader*, P. 75.

sense of powerlessness, finitude, and ambiguity, and (3) creates new avenues and greater consequences for human sin. Chapter 8 concludes by synthesizing Mumford and Marcuse's critiques within Niebuhr's Christian doctrine of sin, and formulating realistic Christian responses to both critiques.

II: Implications

The goal of this thesis was to establish a way of talking about technology that takes seriously the challenges of the technological society without obscuring human freedom and ethical responsibility in so doing. Accordingly, there are two sets of implications this research has upon future study and observation: those ways of discussing technology that this thesis refutes, and the novel approach this thesis contributes that most realistically situates the human in relation to technology.

First, this research refuted the argument that technological neutrality is a viable means of assessing and correcting the problems of the technological society. This thesis showed how the presumption of technological neutrality obscures human contingence to the point that the human is left only with an unsubstantiated faith in the human mind or progress; that the sheer transcendence of humanity will correct whatever problems emerge from the technological society. Not only did this research show that such a presumption is unrealistic, but that such a position is governed by certain anthropological presumptions regarding the goodness and greatness of humankind. This thesis showed that such an expression of an easy conscience diminishes ethical responsibility by reducing evil in the technological society to simply a rational defect that is too easily cured.

Second, this research refuted the argument that technological non-neutrality is a viable means of assessing and correcting the problems of the technological society. Given the constant

expansion of technology into every aspect of life, this thesis showed how the presumption of its non-neutrality obscures human transcendence to the point that the human is left only with a naïve hope in history, mystical intervention, or spiritual mediation. If technology—and the rationality that propels it—is in a constant state of growth and application, a non-neutral perspective of its influence invariably conflates technology's ubiquity with its domination over the subject. Ironically, this thesis showed, the result of the non-neutral perspective is much like that of neutrality, where one's estimation of self precludes one's ability to detect evil as a product of human freedom, but rather as a defect of history or reason.

More positively, the most important implication of this thesis is the observation that to talk about technology is to talk about anthropology, and that one's discourse regarding technology conceals implications about human nature that impact the way humans understand ethical responsibility in the technological society. This observation, when understood from the position of Niebuhr's Christian anthropology, made possible a more honest and realistic assessment of the human's relationship to technology, especially as it pertains to more clearly understanding the limits of what can be known, what cannot be known, what can be controlled, and what cannot be controlled regarding technology.

Furthermore, the affirmation of *technological ambiguity* allows for the biblical notions of humanity to more concretely instruct humans towards a clearer understanding of the self within the technological society, as well as the human's uses and abuses of technology. The re-application of the Imago Dei and Niebuhr's analysis of Original Sin are once again informative to the technological society, as both affirm human transcendence and contingency while also providing a sober warning regarding both when one is obscured in pursuit of the other. By presuming human-as-creator, in accordance with the doctrines of Imago Dei and sin, this thesis

offers a way of discussing human control over technology without assuming ultimate transcendence (pride). By presuming human-as-creature, in accordance with the doctrines of Imago Dei and sin, this thesis provides a way of discussing the influence technology has upon humanity without assuming its bleak enslavement (sensuality).

Additionally, the implications of this thesis should also open new avenues through which the church and its members should understand themselves within the technological society. If the technological society increases both the illusions of transcendence and contingence, there becomes even more reason to return to the central Christian teaching of sin, in both its prideful and sensual forms. Much like in Niebuhr's day, the doctrine of sin needs to be reinvigorated and reestablished as a foundational way the church interprets the self and society. The observation of sin as a reality is the only view of evil that can properly orient the human towards God and away from the perils of pride and sensuality. Acknowledging sin is the proper positioning of the human to God, as the doctrine presumes not only the evil capacities of humankind, but also humankind's capacity for goodness. "The church," Niebuhr argues, "is that place in human society where men are disturbed by the word of the eternal God, which stands as a judgment upon human aspirations."[931] The very last thing a technological society needs, including those in the church, is another voice proclaiming its greatness. Humanity needs no further praise and must be warned that the source of its own greatness is also the source of its peril.

Furthermore, the doctrine of sin needs to become more firmly established in church liturgy—not as some private vice or humorous indulgence—but as a more fully expressed anthropology.[932] Liturgy is not to be, as James K.A. Smith positions it, a rivaling interpretation

[931] BTR, P. 62.

[932] While Niebuhr never devoted substantial energy to the topic of liturgy, he did make an argument for a greater liturgical focus on sin in his essay, "The English Church: An American View" (in *The Spectator* Vol. 157, 4 September 1936, P. 373-374). Additionally, two recent papers argue for a liturgical emphasis on sin from the

of reality, but rather a fuller revelation of reality, even in its darkest chambers. Liturgy is not simply a litany of a church's highest values, but rather a sober uneasiness about those highest values. "No church," Niebuhr exclaims, "can lift man out of the partial and finite history in which all human life stands."[933] A reinvigorated doctrine and liturgy of sin is necessary as humanity grows more powerful, more tempted by power, and more at home with interpretations of anthropology that do not think twice about the perils and ironies of that power.

Working in accordance with a reinvigorated doctrine and liturgy of sin, understanding technology as ambiguous, and regularly critiquing the ambiguities of technology, is a necessary position for both the church and society to undertake. The two greatest mistakes society can make right now is either not take seriously enough the perils of technology, or interpret technology as a realm of determinative action. Both illusions lead to false pretensions about the freedom and responsibility of human beings. At the same time, however, society cannot be duped into the false assurance that it has the slightest foresight regarding what technology holds for tomorrow. The seemingly innocuous instruments used today could very well be the greatest threat to humankind tomorrow; and the greatest technological threats to humankind today could provide the structures necessary relative peace tomorrow. No technological instrument or enterprise is as harmless or as harmful, controllable or out of control, as what humans can imagine, and it is time to admit this ambiguity in humility. It is for this reason that the anthropological limits that the biblical doctrine of sin sets out are just as instructive today as ever—if not more so—as there has never been a time where humanity is in such desperate need

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Nieburhian-anthropological tradition. See: Stephen Platton, "Niebuhr, Liturgy, and Public Theology" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power*, Richard Harries and Stephen Platten, ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Bains, "Conduits of Faith: Reinhold Niebuhr's Liturgical Thought" in *American Society of Church History* Vol. 73 No. 1 (March 2004).

[933] BTR, P. 62.

of both the limiting force of humility and the transcending energies of moral conviction, as contradictory as that might seem.

III: The Way to Move Forward

Much of the limitations of this project are directly related to three limitations: methodology, dialogical constraints, and time and space. The first two limitations were foreseen, as a narrower approach was needed to establish Niebuhr's Christian anthropology within the technological framework; it can be confidently stated, however, that now this perspective has been formulated, the groundwork for both Niebuhr and the concept of *technological ambiguity* can be explored in more methodological frameworks and engage with a wider assortment of philosophers and theologians. The last limitation, namely time and space, however, was unforeseen, but provides a clear pathway from here to build.

Regarding the first limitation, the methodology of this thesis did not permit a more constructive, biblically deduced exposition of the human's relationship to technology. While such a construction seems possible, the opening steps of a Niebuhrian analysis had to be negative, as the prophetic and apologetic methodology more effectively corresponds to his argumentation, vocabulary, and dialectical and ethical approach. However, now that this style is established, a more properly systematic, narrative, or virtue-centric approach could be constructed, beginning with anthropology and sin, and working towards contemporary culture at large.

Additionally, the methodology of this thesis did not permit a more historical approach or explanation of the technological society. While some features were hinted in Chapter 8 regarding the "spirit" and "structure" of the technological society, more work could be done with Niebuhr, perhaps as a critical cross-reference, with the history laid out by Mumford. One

particularly clear area of exploration would involve Niebuhr's critical assessment of the Renaissance as a movement that overemphasized the power and uniqueness of humankind overlaid with Mumford's eotechnic phase. Another could possibly be Niebuhr's critique of Christian mysticism overlaid with Mumford's assessment of the monastic origins of the clock. These are but two further areas that can be explored when analyzing the ideological structure of the technological society, all the while holding to a sober understanding of *technological ambiguity*.

The second limitation of this thesis that provides a window of further exploration is the way in which this thesis constrained itself to two interlocutors. This was limiting in three ways. First, limiting this thesis to Mumford and Marcuse eliminated a potentially fruitful dialogue with Jürgen Habermas, in particular. Habermas, like Mumford, can be viewed as a Soft Instrumental theorist who takes technology seriously, but he also hails from the Frankfurt School and attempts to construct a theory of technology that synthesizes the two through his theory of communicative action.[934] The reason he was not chosen as an interlocutor is the same reason he is now a better suited interlocutor than when this project started: he in some ways already resolved tensions that this thesis sought to resolve, but in a much different way. Before Habermas could be addressed through a Niebuhrian lens, Niebuhr's Christian anthropology must have first established itself from a similar starting point as Habermas. The same could be said additionally for the work of Andrew Feenberg, who played a relatively large part in framing some of the basic language and categories of this project. Like Habermas, Feenberg, too, begins with a similar dialogical

[934] Feenberg states, "Habermas implies that in its proper sphere technology is neutral, but outside that sphere it causes the various social pathologies that are the chief problem of modern societies. Although his position too is powerfully argued, the idea that technology is neutral, even with Habermas's qualification, is reminiscence of the naïve instrumentalism so effectively laid to rest by constructivism." See: Feenberg, "Marcuse or Habermas: Two Critiques of Technology," in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 39 No. 1 (1996), P. 47.

framework regarding Instrumental, Substantive, and Critical Theory, but takes it more into the direction of Critical Theory but supplants its Marxism as a resource for political redesign with democracy.[935]

The second way this thesis was limited by its interlocutors is that it left much dialogue to be had with other Christian authors. While the prolegomena made clear that scholarship regarding a Christian perspective on the neutrality/non-neutrality binary is limited, if not non-existent, there are many Christian scholars who can occupy a similar space as Mumford and Marcuse in that many have excellent critiques of the technological society, but do not allow a realist perspective on Christian anthropology to guide that critique and their corresponding responses. Instrumentalist, Derek Schuurman, and neo-Heideggerian Substantivist, Albert Borgmann are two thinkers in particular who have excellent critiques of the technological society, but lack the realist anthropology to generate realistic or relevant responses to it. Additionally, the same could be said for James K.A. Smith, but bending church liturgy towards a more in-the-world ethic—as mentioned previously, perhaps as more of a prophetic or revelatory liturgy of sin.

The third way the number of interlocutors limited this research is that it could not engage with more popular and publicly visible thinkers on the subject of technology and anthropology. Much could be critiqued regarding the anthropologies of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, especially as they observe the moral landscape in an increasingly technological world.[936] Much could also be critiqued in the technological presumptions regarding such technological pop

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[935] See: Feenberg, *Tranforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002). See secondary source: Tyler J. Veak, *Democratizing Technology: Andrew Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2012).

[936] Both Dawkins and Harris maintain a hyper-naturalistic worldview that provide a precarious foundation upon which ethical responsibility and freedom can be established. See: Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011).

prophets as Ray Kurzweil and Elon Musk. The concept of *technological ambiguity* could be a powerful foundation from which to argue against current sentiments regarding both the popular scientists and inventors of this age, and their respective influence on ethical responsibility.[937]

The final way this thesis was limited was by time and space. The primary concern of this thesis involved great time and space to situate anthropology in a way that could properly position the human in the technological society in a way that allowed for ethical responsibility. This priority made it difficult to include particularities to the subject that otherwise would deserve space. The greatest deficiency of this thesis is clearly the lack of analysis regarding specific technologies of today. Particularly, more research is clearly needed in the way specific technologies manifest in history as ambiguous, and the particular ways these technologies are abused in the form of human pride and sensuality. For instance, much more needs researched on social media, warfare, how today's society understands information from news organizations, and cutting-edge technology that is bound to expand the anxieties and predicament of the human condition: namely, "deep fakes," "fake news," artificial intelligence, and the current political implications of data mining.

All of these limitations provide new avenues through which the content of this thesis can be applied to further establish Niebuhr's Christian anthropology in the current scholarship regarding technology and to further elaborate the position of *technological ambiguity*. Above all, what is needed going forward is a more robust anthropology that can assess ethical responsibility in an increasingly technological world. There is no moment in history that such a

[937] Both Kurzweil and Musk favor views of technology that lead to the absorption of human freedom into technology, leading to the diminishment of ethical responsibility. See: Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005) and Corey Powell, "Elon Musk says we may live in a simulation. Here's how we might tell if he's right" in *NBC News* (3 October 2018).

sober understanding of human nature and technology is needed than now, and the hope is that current scholarship will accept this language and these concepts more fully.

Appendix A

Niebuhr brings to this study a well-established and still burgeoning tradition among both secular and Christian audiences alike. His influence upon key thinkers, both in his own day and today, is prolific and culminates to create a large base from which to draw, and demonstrates the way in which Niebuhr is still relevant to contemporary audiences and concerns.

Niebuhr has been called the "greatest [American]-born Protestant theologian since Jonathan Edwards,"[938] and while Niebuhr had—and continues to have—a pervasive impact within theological circles, his wider influence is seen across a broad spectrum of academic and public spheres. On the theological end of the spectrum, thinkers like James Cone, Langdon Gilkey, Paul Tillich, and Abraham Heschel have all expressed their respective admiration and indebtedness to Niebuhr's thought.[939] On the political side of his influence, politicians Barack Obama, John McCain, and Jimmy Carter, historian Arthur Schesinger, Jr., and social revolutionary Martin Luther King, Jr., have all praised Niebuhr for his great impact upon society and their thought.[940] The great political philosopher John Rawls has even been called "Niebuhr's

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[938] Bob E. Patterson, Reinhold Niebuhr (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 1977), P. 13.

[939] In his lecture titled "Reinhold Niebuhr" (The Niebuhr Seminar. Union Theological Seminary, New York. 18 November, 2008), James Cone states, "There is no thinker in mainstream America who has influenced…my thinking about humanity more than Reinhold Niebuhr. I feel about Niebuhr the way I feel about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X." Concerning Langdon Gilkey, in his book, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001. P. 15) he states, "[Niebuhr] opened up a new *world* to me, a new understanding of the larger reality around us, of the history in which we lived, and so of the communal life of human beings in which we participate. It was an understanding of our being in the world *coram deo*, in the presence of God that he gave me." In his article, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge," Paul Tillich states, "I owe [Niebuhr] more for life and thought than I can express in this place" (Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, editors, *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1956. P. 36). In his article, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr" (Kegley and Bretall, P. 392), Abraham Heschel states, "...the degree to which Niebuhr does influence American thinking is one of the most significant facts of contemporary American history…."

[940] In an interview with David Brooks, Barack Obama called Niebuhr one of his "favorite philosophers" ("Obama Chapter and Verse," *New York Times*, 26 April, 2007. P. 25). In chapter 5 of his book, *Hard Call*, John McCain writes a lengthy exemplification of Niebuhr claiming he is one who is "astute, eloquent, and persuasive" and a "man who understood the paradoxes of war" (New York, NY: Twelve/Hatchette Book Group, 2007. P. 320-321In his "Law Day" address, Jimmy Carter claims Niebuhr as a source for his "understanding about the proper application of criminal justice and the system of equity" and paraphrases Niebuhr when he states, "the sad duty of the political

successor," and has been closely linked with Niebuhr in both of their respective methods and conclusions, expositing a clear relationship in themes and analyses.[941]

Given Niebuhr's influence upon contemporary thought, what is most notable so far as this study is concerned, is his lasting influence and legacy in the political realm. It is evident, simply by noting those who consider Niebuhr a relevant resource, that he is more than simply a thinker to be admired historically, but rather his ideas are relied upon currently in matters of public policy, national security, and economic stability at the highest level of political discourse—topics that are central to the technological concerns of Marcuse and Mumford.[942]

Niebuhr's remaining influence in the political realm is significant for this study because there is a Niebuhrian language already in use in contemporary discourse that can be deployed within varying contexts of public life. Essentially, there is already a place for the Niebuhrian critique of the technological society within scholarship to land, as something of an extension of Niebuhr's influence in the political realm. Effectively, the goals of this thesis are in no way

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system is to establish justice in a sinful world" ("A Message on Justice." Law Day. Athens, Georgia. 4 May, 1974. *Jimmy Carter Library*. Web. 19 November, 2014: http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/law.pdf). Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called Niebuhr "the most influential American theologian of the 20th century" (Schlesinger, "Forgetting Reinhold Niebuhr," *New York Times*, 18 September, 2005. P. 1: http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/books/review/18schlesinger.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). Martin Luther King, Jr. has openly stated numerous times Niebuhr's influence on his thought. These references can be found in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Vol 2*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russel, Peter Holloran (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

[941] In his essay, "Before the Original Position: The Neo-Orthodox Theology of the Young John Rawls" (*Journal of Religious Ethics*, Volume 35, Issue 2, June, 2007. P. 179-206) Eric Gregory shows the influence Niebuhr had upon Rawls, especially in his undergraduate thesis: "Niebuhr and Rawls were realist defenders of a liberal tradition that is wary of perfectionism in politics, yet tries to sustain hope in the face of injustice. Both chastened metaphysical pretension and religious enthusiasm. Both sought to avoid historicist and relativist conceptions of justice. Both criticized appeals to liberty that were not regulated by principles of equality. Both defended the dignity of human persons. Both expressed concern for the least well-off in a society vulnerable to natural contingencies and misfortune."

[942] Concerning president Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize speech, Tom Heneghan states, "Then came the echoes of the man Obama has called one of his favourite thinkers, the 20th century American Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The whole speech had a tone that American political commentators like to call Niebuhrian, either in its phrasing or its tough mix of political realism and moral thinking ("Thoughts on Obama's Nobel Theology Prize speech" *Reuters*, 10 December, 2009. Web. 15 October 15 2014: http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2009/12/10/thoughts-on-obamas-nobel-theology-prize-speech/)."

foreign to the goals of the contemporary Niebuhrian scholar of politics or ethics, and indeed are an extension of those concerns. Niebuhrian resources surround the challenges of the technological society currently, now one must use these resources to confront technological issues directly and thoroughly.

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